Commentary
March 2004

Betrayed by Europe: An Expatriate's Lament

Nidra Poller

The Sino-Saudi Connection
Gal Luft & Anne Korin

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Kandinsky's Mistake
Terry Teachout

Falsifying History: *Benny Morris v. Efraim Karsh*

Books in Review
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Commentary

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March 2004

Letters from Readers

Falsifying History

To the Editor:

Once again, Efraim Karsh [Letters from Readers, December 2003] is trying to hoodwink and bamboozle Commentary's readers.

In an article in the September 2003 issue ["Revisiting Israel's 'Original Sin'"], Mr. Karsh argued that I was derelict in my duties as a historian when, in researching and writing my *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (1988), I failed to consult the archives of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the pre-state Hagana. His charge was based on the premise that the relevant materials in these archives were, in fact, available to independent researchers in the mid-1980's. But as Mr. Karsh well knows, that was not so.

The IDF archive (IDFA) was completely closed to researchers in those years, except for persons enjoying a special dispensation by reason of being employed by the Israel Defense Ministry, or being friendly with a particular defense minister, or the like. Almost all such researchers churned out "official" history. Similarly inaccessible were the relevant files in the Hagana archive. Applicants to either archive would be informed that Israel's Archives Law (1955) had authorized the closure of all military materials for 50 years.

Without explicitly asserting that the archives were in fact open, Mr. Karsh has now produced the names of two Israeli historians, Lt. Col. Elhannan Orren (not "Oren," as Mr. Karsh spells it) and Uri Milstein, whose books on the 1948 war (respectively, 1976 and 1989) were based in small part on IDFA documentation. But Orren was employed at the time by the IDF's history branch (that is to say, by the Defense Ministry), and his *On the Road to the City* is an official whitewash that omits to mention, for example, that the IDF expelled the inhabitants of the Arab towns of Lydda and Ramle on July 12-13, 1948 and that this expulsion, which took place at the end of a firefight, was preceded by the massacre of some 250 inhabitants of Lydda. The book was published by the Defense Ministry Press. Orren later told me, apologetically and somewhat regretfully, that he had labored under severe restrictions.

Uri Milstein's case was unique. Though he was not employed by the Defense Ministry, senior figures from the old-boy network of the Palmah, the IDF's elite strike force, had interceded on his behalf. Even so, the documents he was allowed to see (he did not see whole files) were selected by the archivists; he was not permitted to photocopy anything; and he had to leave his notes behind for review at the end of each workday. In short, as he recently confided to me, "the conditions of research were almost impossible." In their books, both Orren and Milstein were barred from publishing the relevant IDFA file numbers in their reference notes.

The simple fact is that not until 1988 did then-Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, countermanding the 50-year rule, order the IDF and Hagana archivists to begin declassifying materials related to the 1948 war, with the aim of making them available to scholars. By the mid-1990's, the job of declassification was mostly done, and the new material would serve as, among other things, the basis of my revised work, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, just published by Cambridge University Press.

Next, the issue of transfer. I am afraid the case is incontrovertible that the Zionist leadership did indeed endorse the transfer

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of Palestinian Arabs to make way for the establishment of a Jewish state. Contrary to what Mr. Karsh writes, that conclusion is based on much more than the protocols of three meetings of the Jewish Agency executive over "five days" in June 1938. It is also linked to more than the work of Britain's Peel Commission. Zionist advocacy of transfer both pre-dated and post-dated the commission's own recommendations in 1937. The evidence spans all decades of Zionist activity and deliberation before 1948—and Mr. Karsh knows it.

In 1928 and 1930, for example, Col. F.H. Kisch, the chairman of the Jewish Agency executive, in letters to Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, proposed the transfer of Palestinian Arabs to Iraq: "There can be," he wrote on May 20, 1930, "no conceivable hardship for Palestinian Arabs—a nomadic and semi-nomadic people—to move to another Arab country where there are better opportunities for an agricultural life." A few weeks earlier, on March 6, 1930, Weizmann himself had proposed the same thing to Lord Passfield, the British colonial secretary, and Passfield, according to Weizmann, "observed that he was convinced that he would have to consider a solution in that direction."

Weizmann returned to the subject at a meeting with Ivan Maiskii, the Soviet ambassador to Britain, on January 30, 1941, long after the Peel proposals were dead and buried. According to minutes of the meeting, Maiskii said "there would have to be an exchange of populations. Dr. Weizmann said that if half a million Arabs could be transferred, two million Jews [from Europe] could be put in their place. . . . Dr. Weizmann said that they would be transferring the Arabs only into Iraq or Transjordan." (In his own report of the meeting, Maiskii wrote that it was Weizmann who had raised the subject of transfer, and that the good doctor had added: "The Arab is often called the son of the desert. It would be truer to call him the father of the desert. His laziness and primitivism turn a flourishing garden into a desert. Give me the land occupied by one million Arabs, and I will easily settle five times that number of Jews on it.")

David Ben-Gurion uttered similar sentiments throughout the 1930's and 1940's against the backdrop of the growing persecution of European Jewry and the need to find, quickly, a safe haven for them in Palestine. The documentary evidence is plentiful. Unfortunately, Mr. Karsh prefers to focus on a single handwritten letter of October 5, 1937 by Ben-Gurion to his son Amos, maintaining that I have distorted what Ben-Gurion actually wrote.

Since this is not the first time Mr. Karsh has trotted out this canard, let me put it to rest once and for all. In the English edition of *The Birth* (1988), I did indeed quote Ben-Gurion as follows: "We must expel Arabs and take their places." I cited this sentence directly from Shabtai Teveth's *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (English edition, p. 189), and duly indicated as much in my footnotes. Teveth (who is one of Mr. Karsh's allies in the production of official Zionist historiography) was then at work on a multi-volume biography of Ben-Gurion, and I saw no reason to doubt the veracity of this quotation.

A year or two later, however, I learned that it was problematic. It seems that in Ben-Gurion's original letter, the lines immediately preceding the passage in question had been crossed out, either by Ben-Gurion or by someone else. The last word in the crossed-out material is *ein*, "not." If one reinstates that crucial word, the meaning of Ben-Gurion's sentence is reversed.

Teveth himself subsequently argued that the *ein* had been crossed out by mistake, and that Ben-Gurion had really intended the passage to read, "We do *not* need to expel Arabs" (emphasis added). On balance, I accepted Teveth's contention, and in the Hebrew edition of *The Birth* (1991) I gave Ben-Gurion the benefit of the doubt, including the *ein* in my citation of the passage.

None of this is to say, however, that Ben-Gurion abjured transfer, at that point or at any other time in the 1930's and 1940's. On the contrary, in various letters and declarations, in meetings of the Jewish Agency executive, and elsewhere, he continued to endorse transfer, both voluntary (with Arab agreement) and compulsory. As he told the Jewish Agency executive on June 20, 1944, "I do not reject transfer on moral grounds, and I do not reject it on political grounds. If there is a chance for it [I support it]."

One final point, regarding current Israeli-Palestinian politics. Mr. Karsh is right: the only just, reasonable solution to the conflict must rest on a two-state solution, and the Palestinians, whatever they may say to the contrary in speaking to naive or complicit Western journalists and politicians, have thus far rejected this idea. But the writing of history must be based on truth, not on political desires. It is unfortunate that Mr. Karsh is incapable of separating the two. Whatever Zionist leaders may have thought before 1948 or done during the 1948 war—a war launched by the Arabs—need not and should not have a bearing on current diplomacy or solutions.

BENNY MORRIS
Jerusalem, Israel

EFRAIM KARSH writes:

Benny Morris is a fortunate man. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, when I wrote to the left-wing magazines that were carrying his early revisionist work, they declined to publish my criticisms. So much for "liberal" devotion to the marketplace of ideas. Now COMMENTARY has permitted Mr. Morris to air a second response to my September 2003 article, "Revisiting Israel's 'Original Sin,'" even after I comprehensively rebutted his earlier assertions in the December 2003 issue. Although I cannot be enthusiastic about the task, the grievous and lasting damage done by Mr. Morris's writings impel me to set the record straight once again.

In my book *Fabricating Israeli History: The "New Historians"* (1997; revised edition, 2000)—the first and thus far the only full-length rebuttal of the "find-

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ings" of this group—I argued that Benny Morris and his fellow self-styled revisionists were neither new nor true historians. They did not deserve the appellation "new" because they had unearthed no new facts and offered no original interpretations of the Arab-Israeli conflict; rather, they recycled the standard Arab narrative of the conflict, attempting to cloak it in academic respectability. And they were anything but true historians because, invoking the authority of archival research which they had often failed to perform, they violated the elementary canons of their profession as they recklessly rewrote the historical record to fit an image of their own devising.

Now Mr. Morris takes me to task for criticizing his failure to consult primary documents in preparing his book, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. But he himself, writing in the (London) *Guardian* as recently as January of this year, has explicitly *acknowledged* that the "major methodological flaw" of this book is, precisely, its "relative lack of basic military and intelligence documentation describing the operations that led to the Palestinian exodus." He even goes so far as to chide reviewers for having overlooked this "flaw," thus wrapping himself in an aura of honest self-criticism.

But the self-administered compliment is entirely undeserved. Until my exposure (in the second edition of my book) of this "major methodological flaw," Mr. Morris had not uttered a word about it. Only after I brought public attention to the issue did he grudgingly concede that, in writing *The Birth*, he had "no access to the materials in the IDFA [Israel Defense Force archive] or Hagana archive and precious little to first-hand military materials deposited elsewhere."

But what does this mean? If those archives were truly inaccessible, as Mr. Morris now avers, why did he not inform his readers that his historical conclusions were tentative and were awaiting corroboration? Instead, he misled them, representing his "new history" as based on research he did not conduct. And *were* the archives truly inaccessible? In fact, while Mr. Morris was shunning the archives in favor of publicity stunts, other historians were doing painstaking research in them.

Mr. Morris now tries to cover up this fact as well, by downplaying the scope and significance of the work of two such scholars whom I mentioned in the December 2003 COMMENTARY. Thus, Uri Milstein's multivolume study of the 1948 war he dismisses as "based in small part on IDFA documentation," and Elhannan Orren's book he derides as "an official whitewash that omits to mention . . . the massacre of some 250 inhabitants of Lydda."

Several volumes of Milstein's work have been translated into English, and readers are welcome to investigate for themselves whether these are "based in small part on IDFA documentation" or, rather, cite countless documents from the IDF and Hagana archives (the latter tactfully unmentioned by Mr. Morris). As for Orren, if his book is "official whitewash," why did Mr. Morris lean on it heavily in his own 1986 article on the capture of Lydda, and why did he describe it there as "comprehensive . . . [and] generally reliable on the military aspects of the campaign"?

Nor is Orren to be faulted for omitting a discussion of "the massacre of some 250 inhabitants of Lydda," for the simple reason that, as has been conclusively proved by a group of distinguished Israeli historians, there never was a "Lydda massacre."* As has happened often over the past half-century, from the 1948 war to the present day, the Palestinians transformed this military setback into a fictional "massacre." In Lydda, exactly as in Jenin in April 2002, initial rumors noted some 3,000 victims, a fantastic figure subsequently scaled down by Palestinian apologists to 170 (which would still make this the worst such incident in the 1948 war). The figure of 250 claimed by Mr. Morris may refer to the total number of Arab casualties reported by the local Israeli commander—and duly noted in Orren's book.

Nor were Milstein and Orren the only researchers to have consulted the Hagana and/or IDF archives during the 1970's and the 1980's, as Mr. Morris would have readers believe. To name a few books sitting in my office: Michael Bar-Zohar consulted both of these archives while writing his 1975 biography of David Ben-Gurion—a biography used by Mr. Morris twelve years later in implicating Ben-Gurion in the Lydda events (without taking the trouble to verify Bar-Zohar's account). Dan Kurzman, an American journalist, likewise used documentation from the IDF archive for a biography of Ben-Gurion (1983), as did Yitzhak Levi for a book on Jerusalem during the 1948 war (Hebrew, 1986), Yuval Arnon-Ohana for *The Internal Struggle within the Palestinian Movement 1929-1939* (Hebrew, 1981), Joseph Nevo for a 1975 monograph, *King Abdullah and the Palestinian Arabs*, and Shmuel Dotan for *The Struggle for Eretz Israel* (Hebrew, 1981).

Last but not least, Shabtai Teveth, the renowned Israeli journalist and historian, researched the material in the supposedly inaccessible IDF and Hagana archives while writing his own biography of Ben-Gurion. The first two volumes of this work were published in Hebrew in 1975 and 1980 respectively; the first volume of the English edition appeared in 1987, the same year as Mr. Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*.

IT IS Teveth whom Morris now seeks to blame for the distortion of Ben-Gurion's words as reproduced in the English edition of *The Birth*. According to Mr. Morris, he copied the passage in question directly from Teveth's *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (1985), seeing "no reason to doubt the veracity of this quotation." Only "a year or two later" did he realize that the original letter stated precisely the opposite of what had been rendered in *The Birth*; he then corrected the error in the Hebrew edition of his book.

Characteristically, Mr. Morris is being less than

* Alon Kadish, Avraham Sela, and Arnon Golan, *The Occupation of Lydda, July 1948*, Tel Aviv, Ministry of Defense, 2000.

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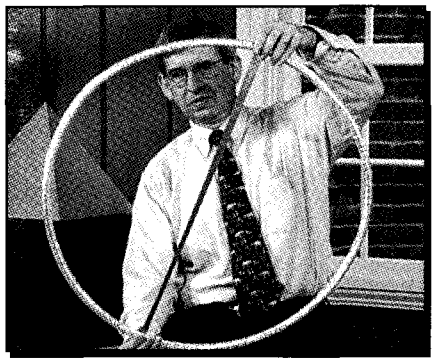

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truthful here. To begin with, the original letter is deposited in the same IDF archive that Mr. Morris failed to consult in composing his allegedly groundbreaking work; if Teveth was able to trace the original document, Mr. Morris could have, too. (In 1988, a year after *The Birth* appeared, he was given a copy of the letter by none other than Teveth himself.)

Moreover, Mr. Morris's protestation of trust in Teveth's veracity hardly squares with his generally contemptuous attitude toward Teveth, whom he has derided as a "mobilized" historian whose work amounts to nothing but "Zionist apologetics." Indeed, when Teveth exposed the "new" historians' professional malpractice in an article in COMMENTARY ("Charging Israel with Original Sin," September 1989), Mr. Morris replied by trashing Teveth's work in *Tikkun* as "a rearguard defense of the Old Historiography which . . . in major points is indistinguishable from propaganda."

More importantly, perhaps, Mr. Morris withholds from his readers the fact that the original, Hebrew version of Teveth's *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* cites Ben-Gurion's letter precisely as it appears in the archives. Oddly, Mr. Morris chose to ignore this verbatim quote, opting instead to rely on the English version of Teveth's book, which contains a somewhat different presentation of Ben-Gurion's words and one clearly more congenial to Mr. Morris's purposes.

Did Teveth, however, actually suggest that Ben-Gurion wished to expel the Palestinian Arabs, as charged by Mr. Morris? Hardly. Here I must remind readers of the background. The relevant passage in Ben-Gurion's original letter, which I reproduced in Hebrew in the December 2003 COMMENTARY, reads as follows:

> We do not wish and do not need to expel Arabs and take their place. All our aspiration is built on the assumption—proven throughout all our activity in the Land [of Israel]—that there is enough room in the country for ourselves and the Arabs.

Unfortunately, someone at some point tampered with this letter, crossing out a number of lines immediately preceding the passage in question, up to and including the second *ein*, or "not" (which in Hebrew grammar stands at the head of a clause). Thus Ben-Gurion appeared to be writing: "We need to expel Arabs and take their place." Teveth, in the English edition of his book, struggled to reconcile this phrasing not only with Ben-Gurion's well-known *opposition* to transfer but with the immediate context of the letter itself:

> In reflecting on the transfer provision of the Peel Commission's recommendations, Ben-Gurion planned his next step: "We must expel Arabs and take their places." *He did not wish to do so, for "all our aspiration is built on the assumption—proven throughout all our activity—that there is enough room for ourselves and the Arabs in Palestine."* [emphasis added]

By omitting the lines in Teveth that I have italicized, Mr. Morris creates the utterly false impression that Ben-Gurion really did wish to expel the Palestinians. No wonder that, in his letter here, Mr. Morris restricts himself to claiming that he cited the sentence "directly"—but not fully!—from Teveth, while gratuitously charging the latter with having misled his readers as to Ben-Gurion's intentions.

THIS TECHNIQUE—taking statements out of context and rewriting them to say what he wishes them to say—is vintage Benny Morris. Consider, for one more example, his rendition in *The Birth* of a speech by Ben-Gurion to Mapai party activists in early December 1947. Here is Mr. Morris the mind-reader at work:

> There was no explicit mention of the collective-transfer idea. . . . However, there was perhaps a hint of the idea. . . . Ben-Gurion starkly outlined the emergent Jewish state's main problem—its prospective population of 520,000 Jews and 350,000 Arabs. Including Jerusalem, the state would have a population of about one million, 40 percent of which would be non-Jews. "This fact [Ben-Gurion said] must be viewed in all its clarity and sharpness. With such a [population] composition, there cannot even be complete certainty that the government will be held by a Jewish majority. . . . There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent." The Yishuv's situation and fate, he went on, compelled the adoption of "a new approach [and] habits of mind" to "suit our new future. We must think like a state."

The unmistakable impression created by this passage is that Ben-Gurion believed that only transfer would resolve the problem of a substantial Arab minority in the Jewish state. Is this correct? Was there really a "hint" of the transfer "idea" in Ben-Gurion's speech? An examination of the full text, both in the secondary source on which Mr. Morris typically relied and in the primary document, shows that he has skewed the evidence in at least four ways.

First, he omits an explicit statement by Ben-Gurion that there can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as the Jewish majority "consists of only 600,000 Jews." He thus makes it seem that Ben-Gurion was preoccupied only with the 60-40 percent ratio, whereas the Zionist leader's real concern was with the absolute size of the Jewish population. Second, Mr. Morris suggests that Ben-Gurion's call for a "new approach" and new "habits of mind" applied to the problem of the Arab minority when in fact it applied to the general challenges attending the transition from colonial domination to national self-determination. Third, he altogether omits Ben-Gurion's statement that, with independence and statehood, the Jews of Israel will need to take "full responsibility for ourselves—and for others." Finally, that these "others" are the non-Jewish minority is crystal-clear in the original, where the passage about taking responsibility for others is followed by this:

In our state there will be

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non-Jews as well—and all of them will be equal citizens; equal in everything without any exception; that is: the state will be their state as well.

In short, Ben-Gurion envisaged Jewish-Arab relations in the prospective Jewish state as based on a partnership among equal citizens. What, then, would he do about the 60-40 ratio between the Jewish majority and the non-Jewish minority? Here too his position could not have been clearer. As he put it in the same speech:

> There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent, and so long as this majority consists of only 600,000 Jews.
>
> From here stems the first and principal conclusion. . . . [W]e must bring a million-and-a-half Jews to the country and root them there. It is only when there will be at least two million Jews in the country—that the state will be truly established.

IN HIS current letter, Mr. Morris has now applied his trademark distortions to Chaim Weizmann, by quoting from a January 1941 conversation between Weizmann and the Soviet ambassador to London, Ivan Maiskii. As it happens, Mr. Morris has been recycling this particular piece of "evidence" for some seven years, including in his *Guardian* article in January.

Mr. Morris's truncated version of the conversation creates the false impression that (a) it revolved around the transfer issue and (b) it was Weizmann who attempted to talk Maiskii into the idea. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The purpose of the meeting was to persuade the Soviet government to agree to a barter deal involving the sale of oranges from Jewish Palestine in return for Russian furs that would be sold through Jewish firms in the U.S. The two men spent most of their time discussing the economic situation in Palestine, the social achievements of the Zionist enterprise, and, as Maiskii put it, the "great Jewish problem" that in his view was bound to ensue in the wake of the world war.

Only when Weizmann ventured that the solution to this Jewish problem lay in Palestine did Maiskii observe that, in that case, "there would have to be an exchange of populations," adding that "they in Russia had also had to deal with exchanges of populations." In reply, Weizmann briefly explained the differences between the Soviet and the Palestine situations and then launched into a peroration on Zionist "efforts at co-operative settlement," especially the nature of the kibbutzim and the sources of their success. When Maiskii returned to the question of the Arabs, Weizmann took care to clarify that the Zionists "were unable to deal with them as, for instance, the Russian authorities would deal with a backward element in their population in the USSR. *Nor do they desire to do so*" (emphasis added).

Not surprisingly, Mr. Morris omits all of this, in favor of a passage from Maiskii's report that serves Mr. Morris's purpose by casting Weizmann as a racist. Interestingly, however, according to Weizmann's report, it was Maiskii who introduced the desert metaphor in the first place, to which the senior Zionist replied only that a certain "Major Jarvis, who had had great experience of [Arabs] in Sinai, had called them in his book 'Fathers of the Desert,' and M. Maiskii had appreciated the allusion."

In any case, Mr. Morris is quite wrong to assert that "in his own report of the meeting, Maiskii wrote that it was Weizmann who had raised the subject of the transfer." Maiskii wrote no such thing. It is eminently clear from the four lines devoted to the issue in Maiskii's two-page report that the context for raising the idea was the ongoing Nazi slaughter of the Jews—not Zionist policy or the Palestine question—and that the issue was how, hypothetically, to save central European Jewry from assured destruction. Even so, Weizmann doubted the practicality of the idea. "The British are hardly likely to agree to this," he said. "And if they don't agree, what happens next?"

In the end, of course, Weizmann's conversation with Maiskii is immaterial. One simply cannot deduce longstanding national trends or ideologies on the basis of a handful of random statements uttered over decades of extensive political, diplomatic, and military activity. Even Mr. Morris has conceded that these musings "did not translate into an expulsion master plan; there was no such plan or policy in 1948"—only to claim in the next breath that this lack of an official policy made little difference, since the "pre-1948 transfer thinking . . . had readied the hearts and minds in the Jewish community for the denouement of 1948."

For this, too, Mr. Morris adduces no evidence. Nor could he, for there was never any Zionist attempt to inculcate the "transfer" idea in the hearts and minds of Jews. No press campaign, no radio broadcasts, no public rallies, no political gatherings. How on earth, then, could ordinary members of Palestine's Jewish community have figured out the (alleged) "transfer thinking" of their leaders, especially given the fact that the public statements and actions of the Zionist leadership in the years preceding the 1948 war invariably emphasized the opposite—namely, the merits of peaceful coexistence?

By contrast, it was the Arab residents of Palestine who were systematically indoctrinated with an ineradicable hatred of their Jewish counterparts and instructed in the need to get rid of them root and branch. Were Mr. Morris truly interested in exploring the role of "transfer thinking" in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, he might have concentrated on the real originators of the idea. The archives burst with testimony to this Arab intent—all the way from the 1920's to the present day. The evidence ranges from religious incitement, to countless statements and writings by politicians, intellectuals, and journalists, to media indoctrination, to official documents.

But no. Instead of tapping the millions of documents underscoring the relentless Arab rejection of Jewish statehood, and the

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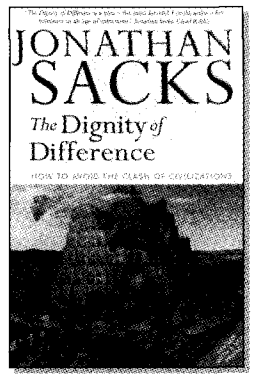

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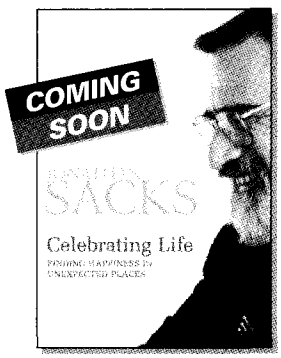

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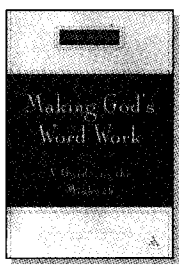

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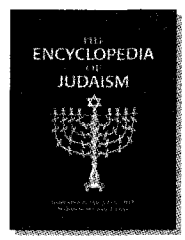

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equally relentless commitment to the state's destruction, Mr. Morris has unearthed a small number of fugitive statements by Jews that he has either ripped out of context or has simply rewritten to say what the speaker plainly did not mean—all this, in an attempt to present the Palestinians as the hapless victims of "a colonizing and expansionist ideology and movement . . . intent on politically, or even physically, dispossessing and supplanting the Arabs."

WHICH BRINGS us directly to the question of politics and the writing of history, raised in the concluding part of Mr. Morris's response. For years, he has gone out of his way to redraft the history of the Middle East, showing no compunction in presenting Israel's very creation as the "original sin" underlying the perpetuation of the conflict with the Arabs. According to Morris, the 1948 war was not a fight for survival by a nascent Jewish state against an all-Arab attempt to destroy it at birth, but rather a conspiracy (one in which the Arab states took part as well) to destroy the hapless Palestinians. After the war, Israeli leaders made no real effort to reach peace with their Arab neighbors, for the simple reason that they "were unwilling to make the large concessions necessary to give peace a chance."

Underlying this contrived narrative was Mr. Morris's professed belief, common among Israeli leftists during the 1980's and the 1990's, that an acknowledgement of Israel's guilt for Palestinian suffering might help make the Arabs amenable to a two-state solution in which Israel would live side by side with a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. To him and others, the Oslo accords seemed to vindicate this belief, and during the 1990's Morris went on to become one of the foremost contributors to the PLO-sponsored *Journal of Palestine Studies*, piling up his anti-Israel indictment and denigrating the works of fellow Israeli historians that he deemed harmful to the Palestinian narrative.

Then came the Camp David summit of July 2000 and Yasir Arafat's rejection of the Israeli proposal for the establishment of a Palestinian state in 90 percent of the disputed territories, with East Jerusalem as its capital. There followed an all-out Arab war of terror that has not abated to this day. Mr. Morris was shaken to the core. How could the Palestinians be so blind to their own self-interest, despite sustained attempts to enlighten them? How could they be so ungrateful for the immeasurable help given to their cause by revisionist Israeli historians and peace activists? Could it be that they deserved what they got after all?

That, at least, is what Benny Morris now appears to believe. In an abrupt turnabout, he has departed from the line he and his fellow "new historians" followed religiously for over a decade and has vented his rage against the Palestinians, whom he has overnight transformed from hapless victims into brazen aggressors—"barbarians," as he has put it, who must be incarcerated in "something like a cage." He has even gone so far as to *justify* the ethnic cleansing to which they were supposedly subjected in 1948—the same alleged ethnic cleansing that formed the burden of his former indictment against the Jewish state.

"There are circumstances in history that justify ethnic cleansing," Mr. Morris has argued in a recent interview in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. He then proceeds to charge Ben-Gurion with "a serious historical mistake in 1948"—namely, getting "cold feet during the war." "If he was already engaged in expulsion, maybe he should have done a complete job," Mr. Morris asserts, adding, "this place would be quieter and know less suffering if the matter had been resolved once and for all."

The trouble with these ravings is that Ben-Gurion was not involved in ethnic cleansing in 1948; nor, so far as we know, did it ever occur to him to become involved in any such activity; nor, finally, did Mr. Morris himself ever charge him with this, not even in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. Rather, Mr. Morris's latter-day Darwinianism—not for nothing did the editors of *Haaretz* title his recent interview "Survival of the Fittest"—stems wholly from his petulant anger at Yasir Arafat and the Palestinians, and his reluctance or refusal to own up to his own decades long professional misconduct. But Arafat's shortcomings, including his failure to conform to Benny Morris's definition of a "fair" solution to the Israeli Palestinian dispute, do not change by one iota the historical record.

Benny Morris now deigns to instruct me that "the writing of history must be based on truth, not on political desires." I could not agree more.

Stage Left

TO THE EDITOR:

Although Carol Iannone calls Arthur Miller "a strange artifact of [the] American Left" ["In Arthur Miller's America," December 2003], it seems to me that his staying power as a playwright stems from his ability—unlike, say, Clifford Odets—to transcend leftist politics. In the course of teaching English for 32 years in one of the most politically conservative counties in Colorado, I was always amazed to hear my students comment that Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* reminded them of their dad, an uncle, or someone they knew. If, as Carol Iannone suggests, Miller's plays—especially *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*—were intended as indictments of American capitalism, she fails to explain why Charley, Willy's foil and loyal neighbor, is financially successful, and his son, unlike Biff and Happy, is secure and stable.

Miller's major plays are akin, in their scope and character, to Greek tragedies. Perhaps this is the reason they remain a staple of the classroom, regional theater, and Broadway revivals. In his preface to *Death of a Salesman*, Miller writes, "I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his

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life . . . to secure one thing—his personal sense of dignity." Surely his best-known characters all attest to this tragic view.

Arthur Miller has much to say about Everyman's struggle to be wholly known. That struggle is a human, not a political, one.

JENENE STOOKESBERRY
Denver, Colorado

TO THE EDITOR:

Carol Iannone is quite right to highlight Arthur Miller's self-righteousness. I have long been revolted by *The Crucible*, which hijacks the bravery of real historical men and women in order to hang laurels on people who supported the bloodiest ideology of the 20th century.

As for her reference to "Miller's enduring popularity in Great Britain," this view has not been unanimous. As Cole Lesley relates in his *Life of Noel Coward*:

> When *Death of a Salesman* came to London, Rebecca West found herself at the first-night party next to a man who asked her what she thought of it. She didn't know it was Arthur Miller, but even if she had, I suspect her answer would have been the same: "Twaddle! What was [Willy Loman] going on about? Judging by the backdrop he owned one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in Manhattan."

HERB GREER
Salisbury, England

CAROL IANNONE writes:

I would not say, and did not write, that *Death of a Salesman* and *All My Sons* were specifically "intended as indictments of American capitalism," but in general I do think that they are informed by an animus against American values (although not as blatantly or simplistically as the plays of Clifford Odets). And of course Miller himself considers them "social criticism."

Jenene Stookesbury does have a point, though, and it is one that Miller has also made in defense of *Death of a Salesman*—namely, that the Lomans' next-door neighbors, Charley and his son Bernard, offer a contrast to the failures of Willy, Happy, and Biff. It is true that Charley achieves a modest, stable success in his small business and that Bernard exemplifies at least one version of the American dream—the boy of humble background who grows up to argue cases before the United States Supreme Court. In my view, however, these elements exist in the play more as a taunt to Willy (Jenene Stookesberry uses the word "foil") than to suggest any instructive contrast to his sadly mistaken ideals. Success does not really interest Miller; it is to Willy that attention must be paid.

Like Jenene Stookesberry, Miller has also claimed that his plays are akin to tragedy. I cannot agree—not because Willy is a mere "common man" but because his dreams and aspirations are immature and even ignoble, and no matter what befalls him he never sees through them. For tragedy, there has to be some fit between a character's own willed acts and the forces over which he has no control. Otherwise, we have not tragedy but, at best, melodrama.

Herb Greer's letter brings to mind Noel Coward's own remarks on *Death of a Salesman* as confided to his diary and cited by Martin Gottfried in his new biography of Miller:

> Went to *Death of a Salesman*. I personally found it boring and embarrassing. . . . Lee Cobb overacted and roared and ranted. . . . The play is a glorification of mediocrity. The hero . . . is a cracking bore and a liar and a fool and a failure; the sons are idiots. To me these ingredients do not add up to entertainment in the theater.

Coward's generation of playwrights, roughly contemporary with Rebecca West, produced the kind of theater—witty, polished, intelligent, restrained—that was the very opposite of the boiling emotional fury of Miller and his Angry-Young-Man British counterparts like John Osborne. It was the cohorts after Coward that helped foster appreciation of Miller in Britain.

Interpreting Islam

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert Satloff's article on Arab reformers and the second installment of the *Arab Human Development Report* (*AHDR*) is very useful ["What Do Arab Reformers Want?" December 2003], but I must take issue with him on one point. He objects to the *AHDR*'s rhetoric about a "humane vision" of Islam and considers it an inadequate response to the "narrow, domineering interpretation" of the Islamists. Mr. Satloff would have reformers avoid the Qur'an in favor of an emphasis on democracy and human rights, on the grounds that any "humane" interpretation of it would surely lose out to the fundamentalist approach.

But religion is so central to Islamic life that any attempt to bypass the Qur'an is, I believe, doomed to fail. Fundamentalism must be undermined if there is to be peace and progress in the Islamic world, and the ideas of Jefferson and Locke should be introduced. But Qur'anic interpretation cannot be left to madmen and murderers.

HARRY I. WOLK
Des Moines, Iowa

ROBERT SATLOFF writes:

I appreciate Harry I. Wolk's kind words about my article and agree with him that "Qur'anic interpretation cannot be left to madmen and murderers." But it is no less a mistake to leave "Qur'anic interpretation" to economists, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists. That is especially the case when the forum is a public-policy document published under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program.

Everything possible should be done to encourage vigorous, enlightened, and forward-thinking reinterpretation of Muslim religious sources by vigorous, enlightened, and forward-thinking Muslim religious scholars. This is an essential element of the culture war going on within Islam today. In this effort, one should note, outsiders can play but a modest role, important only at the margins.

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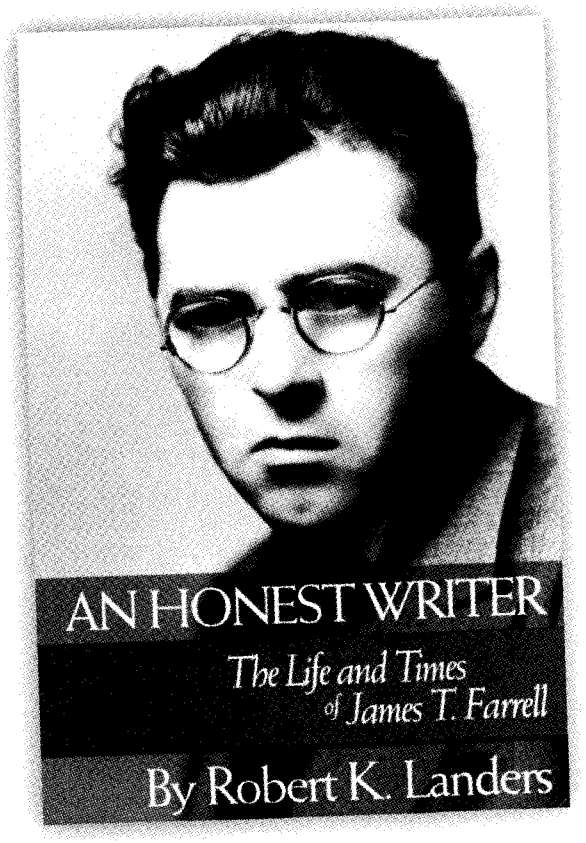

"This fine biography gives us back an American writer who has been too long neglected. Here again is James T. Farrell: working, arguing, marrying, wandering, struggling against the remorseless tides of fashion and dismissal. Here, too, are Farrell's Chicago, the meanings of Irishness, the endless writer's struggle for an elusive truth. Sometimes Farrell triumphs. More often he loses. And yet he goes on, with valor, to redeem the saddest parts of the life itself through persistence and will."

—Pete Hamill

James T. Farrell was one of the brightest stars in the American literature during the 1930s. Studs Lonigan, his trilogy about a young Irish "tough" from Chicago's South Side, was acclaimed as a modern classic. But later, as the naturalism he employed in his best fiction slipped out of vogue, his star dimmed.

In *An Honest Writer*, Robert Landers restores this important writer to his rightful place in American literature. We see here the vibrant Chicago of Farrell's birth and boyhood, and the struggling Irish-Americans who defined the city. We also see Farrell's search for love, and sexual fulfillment, his relationships with friends and enemies such as Theodore Dreiser, Edmund Wilson and Nelson Algren, and his movement away from the radical Left of his youth and his brave stand against Stalinism.

Drawing on the voluminous private papers that Farrell left behind upon his death in 1979, Robert Landers has opened a time capsule whose contents reveal the American literary scene during one of its most contentious times and the connection between literature and politics from the 1930s onward. This landmark biography arrives right on time for the James T. Farrell centenary in 2004.

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A no less important task is to limit the space in which religious discourse itself dominates public debate. This is one arena in which the *Arab Human Development Report* could play an especially useful role. Regrettably, the authors of the most recent volume chose to fight the Islamists on the latter's home turf. In the process they convince no Islamists but almost surely disappoint the growing numbers of non- and anti-Islamists looking for a dispassionate, scientific, scholarly assessment of Arab problems and potential solutions. Whatever faults the report's authors may have as social scientists, the solution is not to moonlight as theologians.

Illegal Immigrants

TO THE EDITOR:

In "A Guide to Schwarzenegger Country" [December 2003], James Q. Wilson misdiagnoses the fevers of his fellow Californians. This is especially apparent when he describes Proposition 187, the 1994 ballot measure restricting benefits for illegal immigrants, as "clearly unconstitutional (and wrong-headed)." As Mr. Wilson must know, the arrival of 4 to 5 million illegal aliens, combined with an econo-mic downturn and the mismanagement of state resources, broke the California bank. The benefits afforded to illegal aliens by the state's welfare system only attracted more takers. (Remember Milton Friedman's dictum: you get more of what you subsidize.)

Proposition 187 was supported by nearly 60 percent of California's electorate, but a district-court judge ruled that immigration was a federal matter and struck down the initiative, issuing an injunction against some aspects of its enforcement. The injunction was due to be appealed early in Gray Davis's first term as governor (beginning in 1998), but Davis, who had originally backed the proposition, prevented the appeal from going forward. On what basis, then, does Mr. Wilson claim that Proposition 187 was "clearly unconstitutional," given that it was tested only at the lowest tier of the federal courts?

Mr. Wilson fails to consider, too, that the influx of illegal immigrants—along with the economic distress he describes—is what brought Democrats and Republicans together to oust Davis in 2003. During his campaign Arnold Schwarzenegger pledged that one of his first steps as governor would be to rescind Davis's decree to allow illegal immigrants to hold drivers' licenses.

VINCENT CHIARELLO
Reston, Virginia

JAMES Q. WILSON writes:

Proposition 187 was clearly unconstitutional because the U.S. Supreme Court held in 1982 (*Plyler* v. *Doe*) that it was unconstitutional for Texas to withhold funds from local school districts that admitted children of illegal aliens. To do so was a violation of the equal-protection clause. Though education is not a "fundamental right," the Court has ruled that denying the children of illegal aliens access to schools serves no rational, and hence legally defensible, position because how these children are treated can affect neither the conduct nor the legal status of their parents. That decision has never changed, and it is surprising to me that Mr. Chiarello thinks that a lower federal court, asked to interpret the same provision of Proposition 187, could have decided the matter any differently.

The Constitution confers rights on persons, not on citizens. First Amendment rights apply to aliens equally with citizens. In other areas, the Court has allowed government to make some reasonable distinctions among persons: for example, states can limit certain jobs, such as police officer or schoolteacher, to citizens and can bar aliens from serving on juries.

Mr. Chiarello is correct to say that the flood of illegal immigrants into this country, and especially into California, is a major problem. But to deal with those who are already here, it is not enough to pass laws denying them benefits, even if a way could be found to make the denial constitutional. More important, I suspect, is to direct the police to question the immigration status of persons already suspected of serious offenses and to ensure that they are deported. Heather Mac Donald has recently pointed out that the Los Angeles police are now denied that authority; if she is right, the policy should change. No doubt there are other measures that could be undertaken. But telling a six-year-old girl that she cannot enter the first grade is not one of them.

Religious War?

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Listening to Arabs" [December 2003], Joshua Muravchik writes:

> the dominant discourse in the Arab world continues to be even more fraught with hate and fantasy than we Americans consider it polite or politic to acknowledge, especially in light of our present need to stress that the war against terror is not a war against Arabs or Islam.

But Mr. Muravchik himself is unable to acknowledge that our war *is* against Arabs and Islam. It is condescending to assume, as he does, that Arabs "really" want the same things Westerners do. Islam has always been a political as well as a religious movement, and the great majority of Muslims seek a kind of polity that is incompatible with religious freedom as we understand it.

Dominated as it still is by a complacent and optimistic form of Enlightenment thinking, the West is almost constitutionally unable to imagine that it could be caught up in an unavoidable and mortal clash of cultures—and, even worse, of religions. At the end of the Thirty Years war, Europe accepted cultural compromises that allowed for religious tolerance and the peaceful coexistence of Catholics and Protestants. These compromises formed the foundation for the Enlightenment, which promptly took them for granted and forgot about them. Now we are challenged by aggressive Islam. Religious war will rage across the world until a new consen-

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The Golan Heights

To Whom Do They Belong? Can Israel Survive Without Them?

In a transparent effort to improve his thuggish image, Syria's president Bashar Assad has proposed to meet with Israeli government officials to discuss the possibility of peace. There can be no question that "peace" is not on Mr. Assad's mind, but rather the recovery of the Golan Heights, from which Syria has launched three major wars against Israel.

What are the facts?

Historical Background—The Golan was always part of the Jewish homeland. The Syrian claim to the Golan is tenuous. Syria, as a political entity, did not exist at all until after the first World War. Until then it was just another province in the Ottoman empire, with ill-defined borders. In 1923, in an Anglo/French great power play, the border between Syria and Israel was established. The Golan Heights were ceded to Syria. Even before the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Syrians, having heavily fortified the area, subjected the villages in northern Israel to almost daily shellings, making normal life impossible. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Syria attacked Israel and was defeated. Israel occupied the Golan Heights and in 1981, for all practical purposes, annexed them.

Syria and its President—Syria is the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East. It is classified by the U.S. State Department as a narcotic-dealing and terrorist state. Its main fury is directed against Israel, which is perceived as a bulwark of Western influence and civilization, both of which Syria abhors and totally rejects.

Syria's former president, Hafez Assad, was a tyrant, every bit as ruthless and as cunning as his unlamented Iraqi counterpart Saddam Hussein. His son, the current president, is equally despotic, though not quite as smart as his father. Syria is a world center for terrorism. It still harbors Nazi bigwigs, who found welcome there after the World War. Few doubt that Hafez Assad was the mastermind behind the attack on the US Marines barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans were killed. The Syrian government oversees one of the largest narcotics and counterfeiting operations in the world.

Military Security—The Golan is a small plateau of about 400 square miles. If it were a part of Syria it would be less than 1% of its territory. But it is of supreme strategic importance to Israel. Its high ground provides early-warning capability, without which Israel—just as in 1948, in 1967, and in 1973—would be subject to surprise attack by the Syrians. Its loss would obligate Israel to stay on constant alert and to maintain a state of readiness and mobilization that would be economically and socially untenable. The Golan, which ranges up to a height of 2300 ft., dominates the Jordan Valley, the lowest point on earth, about 700 ft. below sea level. On the Golan itself, there are only two natural terrain bottlenecks through which tanks can advance. Those choke points are defensible and made possible the repulse of 1400 Syrian tanks that attacked Israel in the 1973 war. But with the Golan in Syrian hands, and without the radar installations that would give Israel warning of any military movements, thousands of tanks—backed up by missiles and airplanes—could overrun Israel in a matter of hours. It would be a strategically impossible situation, especially for a country as small as Israel—smaller than Lake Michigan, smaller by half than San Bernardino County in California. The Golan does not make for perfect defense, but it gives Israel a small, vitally important breathing space for mobilization.

> "With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arab armies could be confident of defeat, and peace would be preserved. To hand back the Golan to Syria at this time would be a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction."

The Golan is the source of over one-third of Israel's fresh water. In 1964, with the Golan in Syrian hands, Syria attempted to divert these headwaters and to cripple Israel's water supply. It is more than likely that, given another opportunity, Syria would once again attempt to destroy Israel's water supply.

Syria has attacked Israel three times across the Golan. Given its implacable hostility, no responsible Israeli leader could possibly return the Golan to Syria. If it were to give up the high ground of the Golan and return to the "death trap" borders of 1967 or anything close to it, Israel, in order to survive, would have to rely on the good will of the Arab states, whose main policy objective is the destruction of Israel. Even though peace-for-peace would be the best solution, how about this: In order to assuage Arab pride, consider granting formal ownership of the Golan to Syria and having Israel—given the precedents of Guantánamo and Hong Kong—lease it back for a hundred-year period. An aggressor will attack only if confident of victory. With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arab armies could be confident of defeat, and peace would be preserved. To hand back the Golan to Syria at this time would be a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction.

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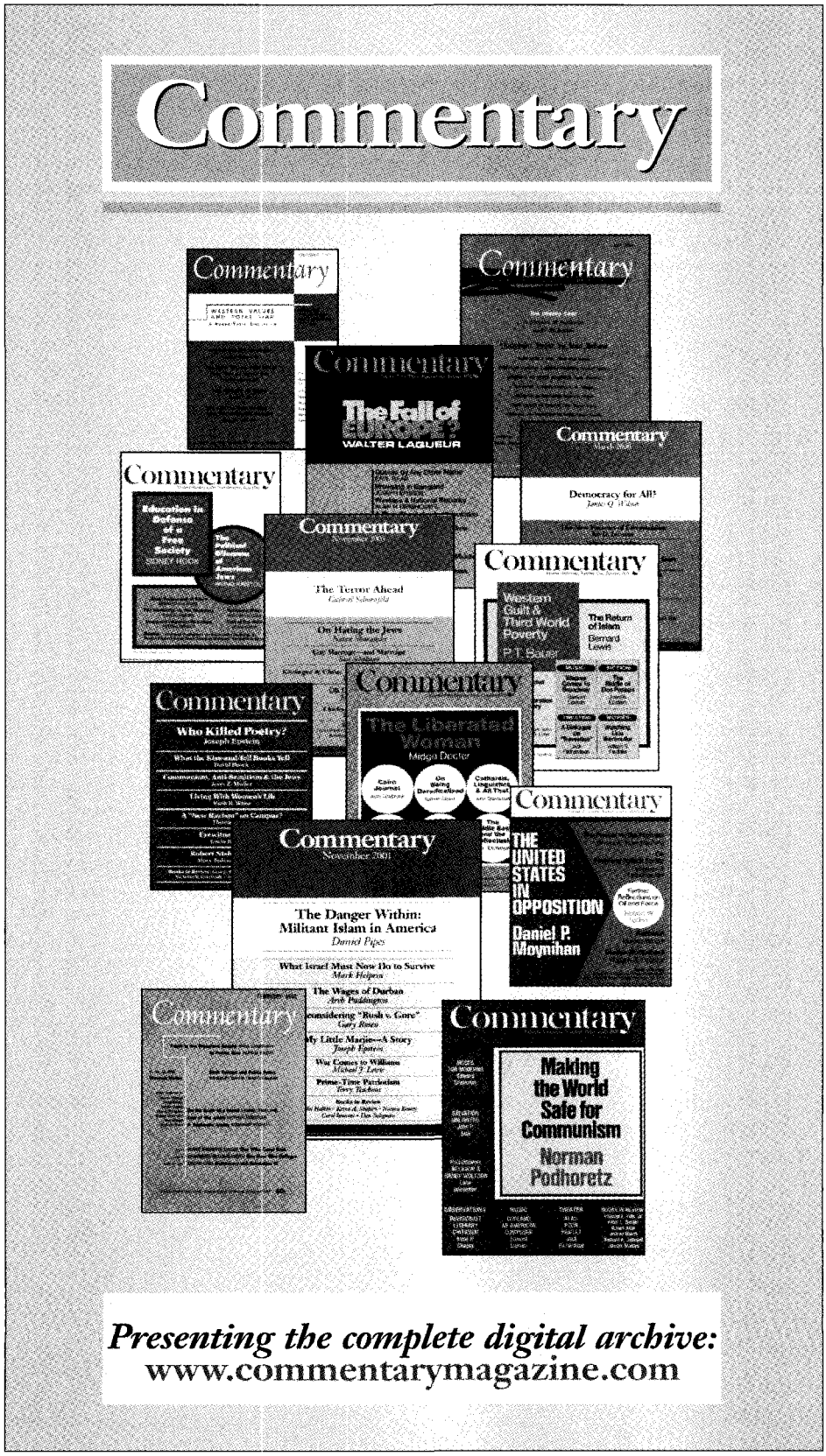

sus emerges from the devastation and slaughter.

DOUGLAS BILODEAU
Bloomington, Indiana

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK writes:

Douglas Bilodeau paints an apocalyptic picture, but the "devastation and slaughter" that he sees "rag[ing] across the world" has somehow escaped me. There are Muslims practicing jihad against the West, but there are others who have no wish for this and still others who are on our side. What "the great majority of Muslims seek" is not known to him or to me or perhaps to themselves, since they have had precious little opportunity for free discourse and peaceful political experimentation. True, the war against terror is (mostly) a war "against Arabs," but it is not a war against *the* Arabs. And it is a war against some Muslims but not against Islam. If it were the latter things, I would like to hear a description of what victory would consist of.

Mr. Bilodeau's invocation of the Treaty of Westphalia defeats his own argument. Catholics and Protestants killed one another and then stopped. I do not know what he means by "consensus" since these churches did not end their doctrinal differences, though they ceased to express them by means of violence. The same, he says, will happen between Muslims and the West, but he seems to believe that this must come later rather than sooner. Why?

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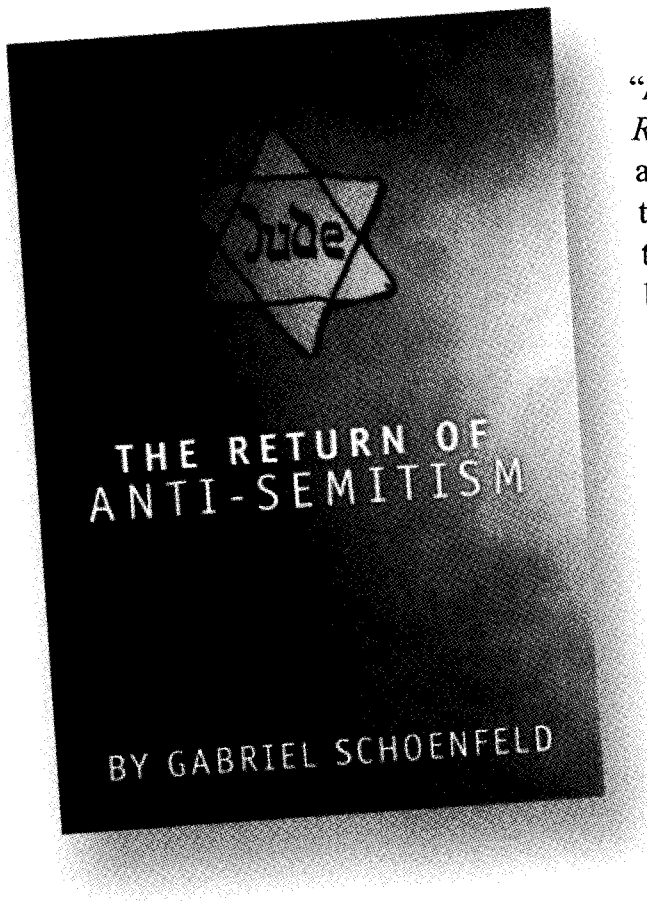

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—Elie Wiesel

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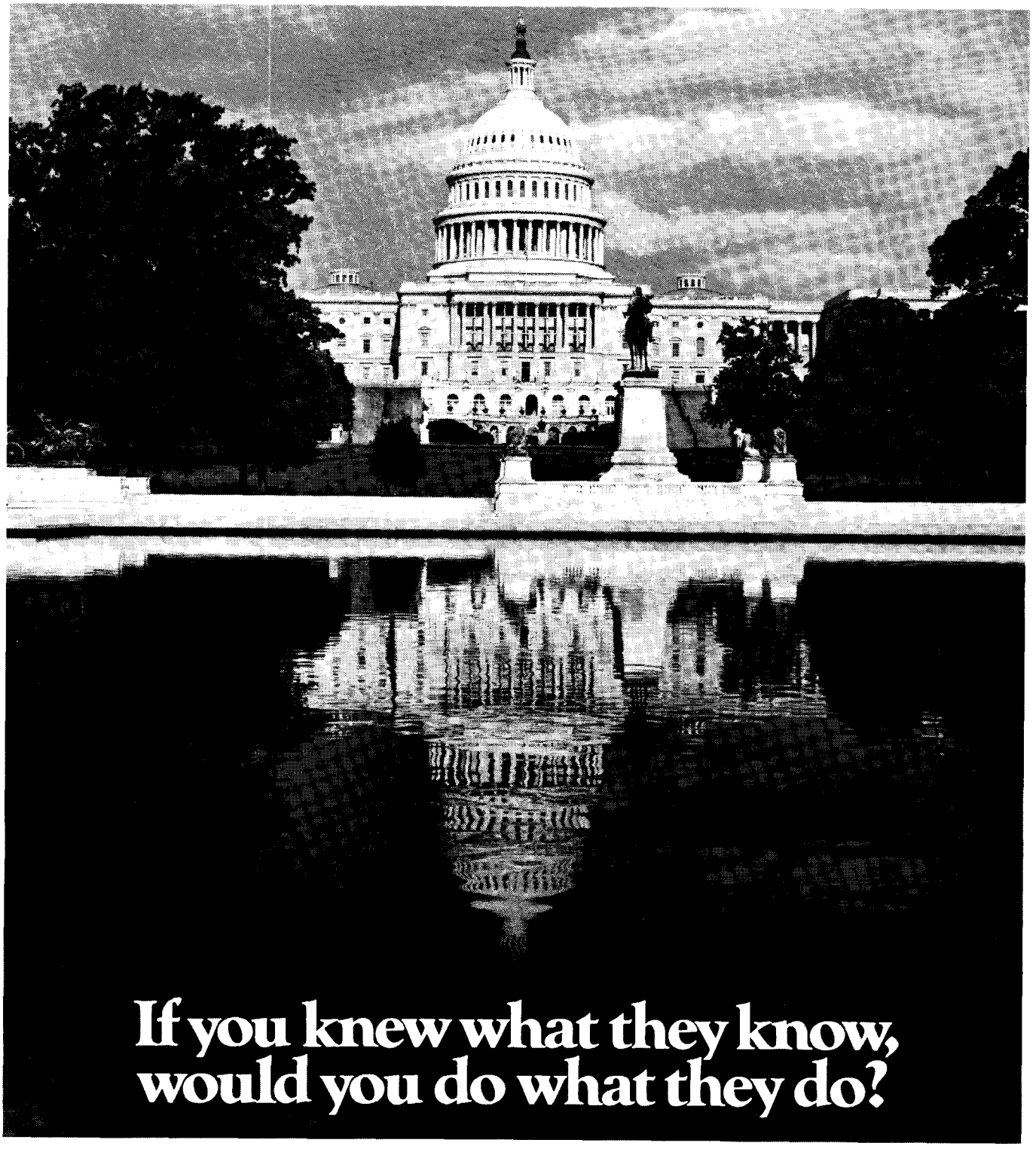

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Commentary
March 2004

Betrayed by Europe: An Expatriate's Lament

Nidra Poller

Washington, D.C., November 29, 2003

It is not so easy to know when you're deluding yourself and when you are finally seeing the light. When I look back at my reasons for leaving the United States for France in 1972, some seem to me as outmoded—and, in retrospect, as endearing—as Beatles haircuts and Vietnam-war protests. Others stubbornly persist. In any event, my career as a serious American novelist having been short-circuited, I opted for the improbable exploit of becoming a writer in French and a professional translator, and I succeeded. I am long settled in Paris; the three youngsters I brought there, tucked under my free-flying wing, are mature adults with fast-growing children of their own. We have excelled in flexibility, risen to every challenge, transformed somewhat slapdash beginnings into a harmonious whole.

What happened? The sea change began on September 28, 2000, when the domestic repercussions of Arafat's prefabricated "al-Aqsa" *intifada* in Jerusalem struck me in a dizzying instant of recognition. I was hardly alone. Stunned and dazed, the formerly integrated, assimilated, liberated, progressive, and (in some cases) indifferent Jews of France found themselves—ourselves—thrust out of the body politic and herded into a virtual ghetto. In the years since then, things have only gotten worse, much worse.

Here I stand, endowed with an intimate knowledge of French language, thought, and reality—and on the threshold, perhaps, of France's, even Europe's, downfall. I know a lot about adjusting to foreign countries, feeling at home with strangers, acquiring exotic skills. I can eat with *ohashi* (don't ask me to call them chopsticks) like a native, I know how to take a shower with a pail of water in an African hut, I can dance . . . well, let me not string out my credentials. The question staring me in the face at the end of this three-week visit is, could I readjust to the United States, my native land? How could I get used to it, where would I put myself, who would I be if I came back home?

I never thought of myself as an expatriate; I'd let my American identity slip away while retaining the free-floating grace of being a foreigner. Instead, I'd been a "European," picking up after a brief interruption not exactly where my family had left off—not Budapest, not Przemysl, those were places we would not go back to—but Europe and all it could boast of. Beautiful cities that are really lived in, monuments at every street corner, savoir faire, craftsmanship, savoir vivre, boutiques, refinement, manners, health care, free education, history, French windows and parquet floors.

And . . . the Shoah? I came back to be European and, irony of ironies, Europe is showing me why my grandparents left. For a novelist and student of his-

Nidra Poller *is at work on a book,* Notes from a Simple Citizen, *chronicling events from 2000 through 2003; excerpts have been published in French in* l'Arche *and in English at* National Review Online. *This is her first appearance in* Commentary.

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tory, this is a fantastic experience. For a grandmother, it is agony. How can I explain to French grandchildren whose very existence is the consequence of my once flighty decision that I cannot entrust them to *their* native land? But how can I lead them to safety if I myself do not know how to go home?

I will have to change my way of looking at things. To some extent, I already *have* changed my way of looking at things. The post-Thanksgiving stampedes at the shopping mall? How I would have slathered them with leftist contempt decades ago. Today I see them as expressions of the common man's patriotism. No, the malls are not for me, I cannot live in a suburb; but it is incomparably better for people to shop their nation to prosperity than to be marching in the streets of Paris for jihad against the Jews or demonstrating for higher wages, shorter hours, and "justice" in Palestine.

The question is, how would I fit into the picture? Walking down a street in Brookline, Massachusetts, I can recognize myself, barely. But months of snow? I couldn't take it. Washington? Too square. New York? Perfect in theory, but in practice too frantic, and too expensive. Wouldn't it be great to reconnect with family, coast-to-coast cousins and nephews and nieces with their children, all so bright and energetic? Yes, but with grandchildren off to college so far away it might as well be Siberia or South Africa, I'd see them once a year if I was lucky.

Where, then?

En route to Paris, December 2, 2003

ON MY return flight--Air France, *bien entendu*—I pick up a copy of *Le Nouvel Observateur*. The images of President Bush's Thanksgiving trip to Iraq are still fresh in my mind. My heart went out to those men and women fighting to defend our lives, our freedom. Would French audiences ever see their shining faces, I wondered? Now, from the cover of the French weekly, a disheartened GI stares out at me, and I have my answer. IRAQ: CLOSE-UP OF A DISASTER, reads the headline. We see only the left half of the soldier's face, full front. His skin is reddened and smudged, sullen defeat veils his blue eyes, his mouth is pouting in reproach. Don't cry, poor boy, the *Nouvel Obs* is here to tell the world the true story of your debacle.

I keep in my archives a gem of an article from the same magazine, published shortly before the first Gulf war over a dozen years ago. It vividly describes—with photos, computer graphics, diagrams, interviews with retired generals—how the Americans, or rather the coalition in which the French were then nominally included, were heading for a fate worse than Vietnam. I'll never forget that article, or the dozens like it. But your average *Nouvel Obs* reader, chortling with delight over the current American "disaster" in Iraq, has no idea of his magazine's track record.

Last year, the journalist Sara Daniel (the daughter, as it happens, of editor-in-chief Jean Daniel) distinguished herself with an article in the *Nouvel Obs* on Arab honor killings in which she alleged that Israeli soldiers deliberately rape Palestinian girls knowing they will be killed (honorably) by their families. This caused an uproar, finally squelched by some wimpy verbiage about inadvertently dropped quotation marks and other such lies. Today, brave Sara is slogging around in Iraq. She spent a few days with the boys (and girls) of the 101st Airborne and, clever little French journalist that she is, found one willing to gripe into her tape recorder.

You know those amateur theatricals in which two people play ten roles? That's Sara's cut-rate journalism. A few quotes from the disgruntled soldier, a few lines about an ambush, a description of the dead and the mangled, and suddenly a whole company of miserable soldiers don't know what they are doing in Iraq and only want to go home. The hitch is, it's a company of one. Evidently the morale of the troops was *so* low that she could find only one soldier to whine for her.

Sara and the *Nouvel Obs* have access to all kinds of information. If you think al-Jazeera possesses the only doorstep at which mysterious videos are delivered to bring Americans the tidings of their imminent destruction, you might be surprised to learn that someone—who could it be, my goodness?—dropped a video at the feet of Mlle. Daniel. In this clip, courageous Iraqi freedom fighters are shooting a missile at a DHL cargo plane. Might this have something to do, perhaps, with some still photos published recently in *Paris-Match*? Same scene, but shot in two forms? I don't know (I've been back in the U.S. and couldn't follow all the threads), but I mean to ask around as soon as I return to Paris.

Already this much is clear. You've heard how terrorists invite al-Jazeera and other insiders to "come along and see us attack the Americans." Well, it seems that for this particular photo-op, *Paris-Match* was included. The way *Paris-Match* tells it, they received only the first half of the invitation, the "come along" part, when to their utter surprise, after three days of hanging out with the brave resistance—lo and behold!—a missile, a DHL plane, and pictures that no one ever expected to materialize.

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As they say in French, *il ment comme il respire*, he lies as he breathes.

Paris, December 10, 2003

I USED to run back to the U.S. for visits of ten days, just to see my family. Then I would return to my true love, Paris, and to my real life. That delicious sweet buttery butter, the perfect bread, our local open-air market. I loved the proportions: the distance on foot necessary to buy food for a day or two, eating all you could carry and nothing more, holding the whole country in the palm of your hand, all of it reachable by clean, modern, relatively inexpensive public transportation. I loved speaking French, couldn't wait to get back to it, loved my favorite boutiques, my fashionable clothes, my daily elegance.

There must be something adulterous about my relation to countries. I had a native land familiar as family, no language problems, my rightful place. I needed another country, a lover who would carry me off to adventure. I came back to my European origins, flourished in a European framework, delighted in making the exotic familiar. And now, my sincere affection betrayed, I am unforgiving.

Back in Paris, on a dreary winter morning, I'd ridden in from the airport with flood warnings cackling from the taxi radio. By the time I got home, torrential rains were inundating the south of France. For the next week, the evening news showed us floods, evacuations, raging rivers, stranded herds. Devastation. Six feet of water in the lowlands. Homes and businesses washed out for the fourth time in three years. Desolate homeowners peeling thick swatches of sodden plaster from recently refinished walls. Tears welling up as the camera panned to take in furniture, household appliances, books, clothes, mementos damaged beyond repair. The entire south of France was wading through rivers of despair. As if the whole country had dissolved in waves of tears. Or divine anger?

Sheep herders, wine growers, shopkeepers, small businessmen displayed their grief with dignity and restraint. On television, unsuspecting families who had bought fake-Provençal homes with red tile roofs and wisteria-garlanded patios were interviewed shaking their heads in dismay. Was it their fault that the regional authorities had issued building permits for flood lands? Now what? The parade of despair formed a panorama out of Balzac: villagers wearing cloth caps and sporting authentic local accents, charming Mediterranean women glowing with healthy sensuality, typical rural backgrounds, landscapes, the people and the products I used to love.

Suddenly they disgust me. What is this simulacrum of a country inhabited by characters pretending to be actors out of a 1950's French comedy? Is it any wonder that they conduct their foreign relations like village bumpkins? But of course I'm faking, too, forcing myself not to like what I liked and to like what I still have misgivings about, breaking loose from my moorings and sending myself into orbit. Because I don't want to leave France and I can't stay.

Paris, January 14, 2004

I'M BEING treated to a poignant lesson in European and Jewish history. The 30's: why did they stay? Why didn't they run for their lives? Couldn't they see what was happening? I see before me a vivid demonstration of the deep roots we dig to make our lives bloom, the intricate biology of a human life, irrigated with the lifeblood of a community, inextricably connected to a society, born of life to give life to keep life alive. Leaving is not packing up and tipping your hat goodbye. It is tearing live flesh out of a living matrix.

I am, or was, the first American-born generation in a family that fled Europe before World War I: a lesson in the wisdom of leaving before it is too late. Now I am the first stage in the story of a three-generation "French" family. Why don't people just pick up and go while they still can? It's always the same. There is an ailing grandmother, a son in medical school, a daughter who just got married, a business too good to throw away and not good enough to sell. There are in-laws and obligations and unfinished business and . . . hope. Hope that it will all blow over. That people will come to their senses, reason win out, normal life resume. And so, blinded by hope, people minimize danger and cling to an imagined stability.

Jews are being persecuted every day in France. Some are insulted, pelted with stones, spat upon; some are beaten or threatened with knives or guns. Synagogues are torched, schools burned to the ground. A little over a month ago, at least one Jew was savagely murdered, his throat slit, his face gouged with a carving knife. Did it create an uproar? No. The incident was stifled, and by common consent—not just by the authorities, but by the Jews.

Some Jews are simply frightened; they are reluctant to take the subway, walk in certain neighbor-

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hoods, go out after dark. Others, clearly identifiable as Jews, are courageous and defiant. Many, perhaps the majority, show no outward signs of Jewishness and do not seek to know the truth about the rampant and increasingly violent anti-Semitism all around them. If you are Jewish but do not defend Israel or act too religious or look too different, you are not yet a target—so why insist on monitoring the danger when daily life is so delicious?

And the lies so tantalizing. A thick, hand-knit comforter of prevarication spreads itself over the French population. Every morning, instead of waking people up, the press tucks them in. France has become a nation of sleepwalkers. You sense it with particular sharpness after a visit to the U.S. How is anyone to face the truth about anything when the truth is hidden by 19th-century-style posturing, pretentious humanitarian hoodwinking, and low-down village tomfoolery?

France is in fact an adversary of the United States—as is its right, after all. But the French honestly believe their country is behaving like a reasonable ally, and there is no way to convince them of the contrary. They are hooked up to an intravenous flow of lies about the United States, fed propaganda disguised as information, molecules of fact dissolved in a carefully regulated solution to keep them on an even keel and save them from having to judge for themselves. No raw data allowed; one mustn't have people developing a taste for reality.

I DON'T see signs that any of this is about to change. Every measure taken in the right direction, or what might seem to be the right direction, hides a fatal flaw. After the floods, and with the exception of a brief parenthesis for a sourpuss acknowledgment of the arrest of Saddam Hussein, the subject of concern has become the *hijab*, the "Islamic veil." Enlightened by the findings of a national commission, the president spoke out grandiloquently in support of a law that would ban the wearing of "ostensible" signs of religious affiliation in schools and government offices. The time has come, said the president, to reaffirm the "values of the Republic" and to put an end to all these separate *communautarismes*, which he pronounced with a big zzzizzzy plural "s."

The law has not been drafted yet (it is scheduled for parliamentary debate in February), and even if it is passed, one wonders if it will ever be applied. But it is askew in its very conception. Unwilling or unable to name the problem for what it is—political Islam on the march—the government has turned headscarves into a religious issue and lined up its troops on the barricades of that peculiar French form of universalism known as *laïcité*. Since religion is the official culprit, the law will be even-handedly aimed at the kippa as well, adding insult to injury for religious Jews just at a time when France's chief rabbi has advised them to hide their yarmulkes under baseball caps so they won't be beaten up by Islamists on the rampage.

So now, in the name of a doctrine originally promulgated to provide a bulwark against an overbearing Catholicism, the Jews are to be thrown in with those who really are hammering away at the secular values of the *République*. Jews lived quietly in France for centuries before the massive Muslim immigration started after World War II—but suddenly you cannot say anything bad about Muslims without saying something bad about Jews?

To be sure, the law is also going to mention that Catholics must not wear big crosses to school; but to my knowledge they have never intended to. Largely indifferent to the once-powerful Church that provoked the 1905 law mandating the separation of church and state, the vast majority of French Catholics swear by the principle of *laïcité* and don't even begin to suspect that they are being turned into *dhimmis* in their own country.

The handpicked leader of a recently created Muslim umbrella organization has called for reluctant compliance with the proposed law while already haggling for an Oriental compromise. But the major element in the organization, the radical UOIF, has mobilized against the law and against a Republic that would dare discriminate against Islam. You can't fool them by banning yarmulkes! And they intend to fight.

WILL THE pacifist and pacified French stand up and defend their nation? Or will we have to leave?

That is what it boils down to. Things have gone from shouting "death to the Jews" to firebombing schools and synagogues, to persecution, attacks, even murder. We have Muslim rage in schools, hospitals, and courtrooms. Police headquarters are attacked, hospital personnel beaten, judges threatened. The Republic is under siege, and what are the French doing about it? They are trashing America.

This, it seems, is their new Maginot line: the sneer of hatred. Hand in hand with the government and the intellectual classes, the French media are channeling the national dismay over lost grandeur into contempt for America. Watch these suave Europeans, snickering to themselves because

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American soldiers are getting killed in Iraq. Is that (they sneer) any way to risk your life? Go on a crusade to fight incurable disease, cross in front of a moving car, smoke a cigarette. But fight to defend your own country? It's indecent!

For me, the monuments are crumbling. The glistening golden dome of Les Invalides. The châteaux and the triumphal arches, the obelisks, the buxom fountains, the wrought-iron balconies, the slightly tipsy 18th-century apartment buildings, the rivers winding through those darling towns and cities. How can so much beauty cover such deep cowardice? I lash myself to the mast and close my senses to the sirens, while my heart rings with pride for "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

We are not free in France. I know the difference. I come from a free country. A rough and ready, clumsy, slapped together, tacky country where people say wow and gosh and shop at Costco. A country so vast I haven't the faintest idea where I would put myself. A homeland I would have liked to keep at a distance, visit with pleasure, and leave with relief. A native land I walked out on with belated adolescent insouciance. A foreign land where I was born because Europe vomited up my grandparents as it is now coughing up me and mine.

If only the accusations bandied about so mindlessly by the French talking heads were true: American imperialism, Washington's insatiable drive for hegemony, the Yankee need to dominate the world, and all the rest, the whole stars-and-stripes version of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Just look at the American eagle spreading its wings, asserting its dominion: look at those sharp claws, that crafty eye, that hooked nose. If only it were true. Give me empire, my dear Yanks. Come over here and colonize this place so that I can put my suitcases back on top of the closet, keep my swishes and furbelows, my fanfreluches and baubles, my adopted family jewels and Continental airs, and live to a ripe old age here in the center of Paris, in the middle of nowhere.

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The Sino-Saudi Connection

Gal Luft & Anne Korin

China, Napoleon once remarked, is a sleeping giant, and "when it awakens the world will tremble."

China is now thoroughly awake. The economy of the world's most populous country has been growing at a blistering rate of between 8 and 11 percent a year. Last year, the People's Republic of China (PRC) superseded Mexico as the United States' main trading partner. It also took Japan's place as, after us, the second largest consumer of petroleum on the globe.

If the world has not yet quite begun to tremble in the face of these facts, the economic and geopolitical implications of the new Chinese prosperity are nevertheless immense—and not least where energy markets are concerned. Growing wealth is prompting millions of Chinese to abandon bicycles and overcrowded mass transit in favor of private cars. Last year, China's domestic automobile sales increased by a staggering 69 percent. By 2010, the country is expected to have 90 times more cars on the road than it did in 1990; by 2030, it may have more than the U.S.

Such a gigantic fleet requires fuel. But China's domestic oil production is declining. Already by 1993, after decades of self-reliance, domestic crude output was failing to meet the growing demand, and the country became a net importer; since then, dependence on foreign oil has increased steadily. According to a conservative estimate by the U.S. Department of Energy, China's oil imports over the next two decades will grow by 960 percent. The International Energy Agency predicts that, by 2030, those imports, now at 1.9 million barrels a day, will rise to at least 10 million barrels a day, the current import level of the United States.

Some Chinese oil imports come from Kazakhstan, Venezuela, the Sudan, Russia, and Indonesia. These will no doubt continue, and increase. Nevertheless, a decade hence, the lion's share of China's energy imports will almost certainly come from one source: the major oil exporters of the Middle East.

China is a relative newcomer to the Middle East; unlike the other great powers, it has never played a major role in the region. During the cold war, the geographically distant Chinese preferred to stay away from the intricacies of an area so beset by instability. Until Mao Zedong's death in 1976, China had not even bothered to establish diplomatic relations with most of the local capitals.

Only in the late 70's did Beijing emerge from its seclusion, forging ties with Jordan and Syria and almost all of the oil-rich states. These relationships have typically revolved around trade in armaments and dual-use technology. In recent years, China has

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supplied ballistic missiles to Syria, provided sensitive missile and nuclear technology to Iraq, and plied Libya with missile technology.

Iran, now the second largest supplier of China's oil, has become a particularly important trading partner. As relations between the two countries have expanded, the PRC has sold ballistic-missile components to Iran as well as air-, land-, and sea-based cruise missiles, giving Tehran the capability to attack U.S. naval forces in the strategically vital waters of the Persian Gulf. Even more significantly, China has provided Iran with key ingredients for the development of nuclear weapons, including reactors and significant quantities of uranium. If Iran is today well on its way toward an indigenous nuclear-weapons capacity, that is thanks in no small part to Beijing.

But the biggest prize in the region is Saudi Arabia, the country that holds a quarter of global oil reserves, that is the world's largest exporter, and that is today China's number-one foreign supplier of crude oil.

As far back as the mid-1980's, China began to engage in military commerce with Riyadh, selling it 36 intermediate-range ballistic missiles, building two missile bases south of the Saudi capital, and deploying Chinese security personnel to maintain them. Though the missiles were highly inaccurate, they endowed Saudi Arabia with a military potential its neighbors could not ignore. With a range of 1,800 miles, and capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, they could be used to strike any location between New Delhi and Tel Aviv.

In the years since that early sale, Sino-Saudi relations have grown only closer, especially after the two countries established full diplomatic ties in 1990. As military cooperation has deepened, China has offered to sell the Saudis, among other things, modern, solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missiles with a range of up to 3,500 miles. A regular series of high-level visits by Chinese leaders culminated in President Jiang Zemin's pronouncement of a "strategic oil partnership" between the two countries in 1999.

Could China supplant the U.S. as a major Saudi ally? At the moment it hardly seems likely. China is still a modest force in the Middle East, while the U.S. maintains large numbers of troops and formidable amounts of equipment in bases throughout the region. But given the logic of its domestic needs, Beijing is almost certain to step up its diplomatic and military efforts. Making its path easier is the fact that this also happens to be a moment of deep tension in U.S.-Saudi relations.

Ever since September 11, 2001, when it emerged that fifteen of the nineteen men who carried out the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were Saudi citizens, the American media have been full of tales of Saudi laxity in fighting terror, not to mention complicity in funding and inciting it. Relatives of the victims of 9/11 have filed a multi-trillion-dollar lawsuit against Saudi Islamic organizations and three top members of the royal family. A widely publicized book, *Sleeping with the Devil*, by the former CIA official Robert Baer, trumpets the idea of simply seizing the Saudi oil fields (an idea whose strategic rationale was first adumbrated in a January 1975 Commentary article by Robert W. Tucker).

Public anger at the Saudis has also begun to be reflected in the workings of the U.S. government. Under new immigration guidelines, the expedited entry procedures of the pre-9/11 era have been eliminated, and Saudi males seeking to enter this country are subject to special scrutiny. In 2002, the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board heard a RAND Corporation expert describe Saudi Arabia as the "kernel of evil" and, like Baer, advance the notion of seizing and occupying oil fields in the country's eastern province. Anti-Saudi sentiment in Congress is also running high, and there has been a steady drumbeat of opposition to the presence of American forces on the Saudi peninsula. In 2003, following the defeat of Saddam Hussein, the Bush administration responded to this pressure by withdrawing the bulk of those forces, relocating them in nearby Qatar.

Though it was done quietly, the American military departure may turn out to be a major strategic turning point. It certainly has created new opportunities for both the Saudis and the Chinese.

In Saudi Arabia itself, growing U.S. animosity has fed doubts about America's dependability as an ally, if not outright fears of Washington's long-term intentions. Many worry, with reason, that the liberation of Iraqi Shiites from Saddam Hussein's oppressive rule may ignite discontent among the kingdom's own Shiites, who happen to be situated geographically atop the largest oil fields. Equally disturbing for many Saudis is the American effort to revive Iraq's shattered oil industry. The infusion of an additional 6 million barrels per day into world oil markets will inevitably mean fewer petrodollars for the economically stretched kingdom.

No wonder, then, that Saudi newspapers and officials alike have taken to deriding harshly what they call the American "pressure campaign" against their country. For the first time since 1973, ac-

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cording to the *New York Times*, some have even spoken openly about cutting off oil supplies unless Washington alters direction. At the very least, the Saudi government appears to recognize that it can no longer depend on the U.S. as the guarantor of its security, and that it is time to diversify the kingdom's portfolio.

The internal politics of the Saudi royal family are notoriously difficult to decipher. The kingdom's de-facto ruler, Crown Prince Abdullah, heads what constitutes the pro-American faction, which has always stressed the high quality of U.S. military equipment and the reliability of U.S. logistical support. But there is increasing opposition to this view. In particular, the minister of defense, Prince Sultan (who is the father of the current Saudi ambassador to the U.S., Prince Bandar), has been enthusiastically promoting expanded Sino-Saudi relations as a hedge against American fickleness. As the Saudis watch opinion shift against them in Washington, and as fears develop that Congress may block transfers of sophisticated weaponry, the pro-Chinese element is gathering strength.

THERE ARE some particularly alarming scenarios to consider here. If the Saudis were to begin worrying seriously about a future American seizure of their oil fields, they might well seek ways to deter it. Given the weakness of their own military, one option would be to acquire nuclear weapons. Although talk of a nuclear-armed Saudi Arabia may, at this juncture, seem farfetched, it is not beyond the realm of possibility. Saudi Arabia could break its military dependence on the U.S. either by entering into an alliance with some other existing nuclear power or by acquiring its own nuclear capability. In either case, China would play a crucial role.

If the Saudis opted to acquire their own bomb, they would likely become the first nuclear power to have bought one off the shelf. Were this to happen, it would represent the culmination of a Sino-Saudi-Pakistani nuclear project that began in May 1974 when, following India's ascension to the nuclear club, China sent scientists to assist Pakistan in developing that country's own nuclear program. By the early 1980's, China had supplied the Pakistanis with enough enriched uranium to build a few weapons. In 2001, the CIA reported that China was continuing to lend "extensive support" to Pakistan's program. Today, Pakistan is estimated to have an arsenal of between 35 and 60 nuclear weapons.

How did Pakistan, with its grinding poverty, pay for this expensive project? Some of the costs were undoubtedly carried by the Chinese in pursuit of their own interests, including their rivalry with India. But considerable evidence suggests that Saudi Arabia played a part as well. In May 1999, a year after Pakistan's first nuclear test, Prince Sultan, escorted by then-prime minister Nawaz Sharif, toured the country's uranium-enrichment and missile-production facilities at Kahuta—the only foreign dignitary allowed into a facility that was off-limits even to then-president Benazir Bhutto. There he was briefed by Abdul Qader Khan, the controversial father of Pakistan's "Islamic bomb." In 2002, Khan, in turn, led a delegation of Pakistanis to Saudi Arabia as personal guests of Prince Sultan. All told, according to Robert Baer, Saudi Arabia has poured over $1 billion into Pakistan's nuclear program.

Even if Saudi Arabia does not pursue nuclear status, however, it has abundant reasons for looking east to China both for markets and for military assistance, just as China has abundant reasons for looking west to Saudi Arabia for continued access to Middle Eastern oil. And aside from these mutual interests, an alliance with China would hold other attraction for the Saudis. Unlike the U.S., the Chinese do not aspire to change the Arab way of life, or impose freedom and democracy on regimes that view such ideas with skepticism and fear. Indeed, Chinese attitudes toward the open societies of the West are markedly similar to those of the Arab despotisms themselves.

The Chinese also have at their disposal immense reserves of manpower, which they can deploy to protect the oil resources of any new allies they acquire. Thousands of Chinese soldiers disguised as oil workers, for example, are used today to guard petroleum facilities in Sudan. With 11 million men reaching military age annually, China could easily replicate this elsewhere. Finally, while the U.S. is continually castigated by the Arabs for its closeness to Israel, China's ties with Jerusalem have never risen above the level of indifference.

OF COURSE, many other factors must be weighed in the balance. The Chinese may well find fishing in Middle Eastern waters to be a risky business, entailing high costs in relations with other powers, and in particular with the U.S.

Already there are signs of growing disquiet in Washington over China's role in the Middle East. The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a group created by Congress to moni-

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tor relations between the two countries, issued a warning in 2002 over China's provision of "technology and components for weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems" to such Middle Eastern states as Iran, Syria, Libya, and Sudan. This was characterized as "an increasing threat to U.S. security interests." Significantly, the report took special notice of China's growing dependence on imported oil, calling it a "key driver" impelling relations with "terrorist-sponsoring governments" in the region.

If such concerns continue to mount, China could find itself gaining in one region only to lose in another. The Chinese economy may be heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil, but it is also heavily dependent on trade with the U.S. The shelves of Wal-Mart alone account for 10 percent of China's exports to the U.S. and 1 percent of China's GDP.

Whether and under what circumstances the U.S. would ever choose to exercise its leverage is another matter. Right now, any collision over Middle Eastern oil is more a potential than an actual threat. Besides, if predicting the future is risky at all times, the present moment makes the exercise almost foolhardy. That the Middle East is in an exceptionally volatile condition goes without saying. And as for China, its astonishing economic growth may yet turn out to be a bubble; if it pops, so will its high rates of energy consumption. Then, too, even if stellar economic growth continues, the Chinese may find attractive alternatives to oil: the country is extremely rich in coal and natural gas, and, since it has not yet invested heavily in an expensive petroleum infrastructure, it could develop ways to harness fuels produced from coal and biomass (both of which it has in abundance) and thus overcome its dependence on imported oil altogether.

Still, it is worth bearing in mind that the U.S., which has been trying for three decades to break its addiction to Middle Eastern oil, has only become more dependent with each passing year. Whether the Chinese can do better remains at best an open question. For the time being, the trend lines are what they are: oil reserves elsewhere are being depleted faster than in the Middle East, and before too long that region will contain the last remaining reservoir of cheaply extractable crude. If each barrel the U.S. needs is also sought after by China, a superpower conflict in the world's most unstable region can once again become an omnipresent danger. At that point, as Napoleon foresaw, the world will surely tremble.

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Bloomberg So Far

Fred Siegel & Harry Siegel

When Michael Bloomberg was elected mayor in 2001, New Yorkers had little idea what to expect from him. A liberal Democrat by disposition turned Republican by opportunity, the billionaire media baron had no previous political experience. He had used his fortune to conduct a stealth campaign, bombarding the public with direct mailings and television advertising and making virtually no unscripted appearances. Wrapped only in the halo of outgoing mayor Rudolph Giuliani's belated endorsement, and widely expected to lose, the would-be mayor was barely questioned, let alone tested, before he took office.

In the immediate wake of 9/11, Bloomberg's conciliatory and willfully apolitical style turned out to be well suited to the city's sense of trauma. The political neophyte seemed to promise Giuliani-like results without the ex-prosecutor's abrasive, stentorian style. Now, halfway through his tenure and with talk of the next mayoral election already in the air, Bloomberg has a record and an established public personality. He is far more of a known quantity, even if much of what can now be said about him is neither especially flattering nor encouraging for the future of New York.

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To his credit, and despite his sometimes graceless efforts to escape his predecessor's shadow, Bloomberg has consolidated and even extended a number of Giuliani's most important achievements. Contrary to the expectations of many commentators, there has been no increase in crime in New York City, nor a renewed sense of urban dread and menace. In fact, since Bloomberg took office, the crime rate has dropped a further 10 percent, thanks in no small measure to the latitude that he has given to his police commissioner, Raymond Kelly. Moreover, as the mayor noted in his recent State of the City address, "We've done all this while protecting the nation's most important city against the constant threat of terror."

Bloomberg has also built upon the success of Compstat, the block-by-block breakdown of crime statistics that Giuliani instituted as a way to assign responsibility for public safety. Now the city has a similar system for quality-of-life problems, based on phoned-in complaints. By replicating the Compstat ethos of tracking data and quickly spotting undesirable trends, Bloomberg has made the city more responsive to the petty annoyances—potholes, noise violations, inadequate garbage pickups, cell-phone dead spots—that can make life in New York a daily trial.

Bloomberg's most significant accomplishment to date has been winning back mayoral control of the city's schools. For years, 110 Livingston Street, the Board of Education's downtown Brooklyn address,

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had been shorthand for Byzantine bureaucracy and wanton waste. Giuliani had paved the way for the takeover with his tough talk about the need to "blow up" the Board of Education; but the former mayor's enemies in Albany, where such decisions are made, refused to give him the victory. State lawmakers proved more receptive to Bloomberg's calm and conciliatory style.

From a purely administrative point of view, Bloomberg's reorganization of the schools has thus far been highly successful. Textbooks are delivered on time, and supplies are available. The powerful custodians' union, which has been ripping off the city for years, is being brought to heel though the partial privatization of janitorial services. More important, a mayor can no longer hide behind the Board when schools perform poorly while stepping forward to take credit for any and all signs of educational progress. Bloomberg has repeatedly said that if he fails to reform the education system, he should be voted out of office—a commendable pledge of accountability.

But there are other items than these on Bloomberg's ledger sheet, and too many of them fall decidedly into the debit column. Though there is no denying the importance of his having won mayoral control of the schools, his use of that control with respect to the curriculum has been irresponsible, even reckless. As a candidate, Bloomberg spoke of the need for a back-to-basics approach to education. But the instructional program imposed by the mayor and his schools chancellor, Joel Klein (formerly the Justice Department's lead counsel in the Microsoft case), is straight out of the left-wing fever swamps of Columbia Teachers College.

Advised by Diana Lam, a well-known advocate of "progressive" education, Klein abandoned a variety of phonics programs that had shown some success in improving reading scores, replacing them with a one-size-fits-all "whole language" approach that has a long history of failure. Worse, the literacy effort has been micromanaged from Klein's office, which has told even experienced and successful teachers how to arrange every minute of their day and every inch of their classrooms. Blackboards, for example, are prohibited, as is arranging chairs in rows with the teacher in the front. (According to the slogan of progressive education, a teacher must act not as "a sage on the stage" but as a "guide on the side.") This attack on pedagogical authority has even extended to school discipline, emboldening unruly students and generating a surge in violence against teachers.

Education aside, Bloomberg has expended valuable political capital on various pet causes. The most notorious of these has been his anti-smoking campaign. He used much of the good will of his honeymoon in office to pass a draconian law that banned smoking in bars and other heretofore unregulated places and dramatically raised the cigarette tax—an issue he had not mentioned as a candidate. The predictable result has been a new and violent black market in out-of-state cigarettes and vastly increased noise levels outside bars, some of which have lost considerable business. Even voters sympathetic to his cause were offended when the mayor promoted it by warning the citizenry, with missionary zeal, that "more people [would] die from second-hand smoke than were killed in the World Trade Center."

A worthier effort, if one handled just as badly, was Bloomberg's campaign in 2003 to persuade voters to approve a ballot initiative establishing nonpartisan elections for mayor and City Council. The proposal was hardly revolutionary. Nonpartisan elections—already in place in eight of the country's ten largest cities—open up municipal government to a wider range of interests. In New York City, such a reform would help to break the powerful hold of the public-sector unions, whose highly organized members dominate the all-important Democratic primary.

But it takes time to explain how nonpartisanship would make elections more competitive and politicians more accountable. Bloomberg insisted on rushing the matter, placing it on the ballot only a few months after it was officially proposed by a charter commission that he had appointed. Trying to replicate the stealth tactics that had helped him win the mayoralty, he blitzed voters with a last-minute, $7.5-million direct-mail campaign. The results were predictable. Although nonpartisanship enjoyed a slight majority of support among the electorate as a whole, the 12 percent who bothered to vote in this off-year ballot—many of them drawn from the same pool of public-sector employees whose influence Bloomberg was trying to limit—defeated the proposal by a margin of more than 2 to 1. In what Dan Janison of *Newsday* called his "Evita moment," the mayor declared that what mattered was not the outcome but the effort: "I was a big winner yesterday."

Even a reform as intelligent as nonpartisan elections is no substitute for dealing more directly with the public-sector interests that have long been the fiscal albatross around New York

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City's neck. Like Giuliani before him, Bloomberg was given a poor economic hand. The city was in recession even before 9/11, and the new mayor was saddled with rising pension and Medicaid costs imposed during Giuliani's boom years. He arrived in office facing a budget deficit of $4 billion.

But unlike Giuliani, Bloomberg played his poor hand poorly, especially in his dealings with his "friend," Governor George Pataki, on one side and with the public-sector unions on the other. In both cases his watchword was "partnership"—in contrast, presumably, with Giuliani's vaunted confrontationalism. Thus, lavishing praise on the Republican governor and donating $1 million of his personal money to the state GOP, Bloomberg went so far as to support an obviously unpopular fare hike imposed on the city's buses and subways by the Pataki-controlled transportation authority. What he got in exchange was worse than nothing. Pataki refused Bloomberg's reasonable request to help reinstate the city's small but symbolically important commuter tax, while permitting him to raise the city's sales and income taxes, already the highest in the region.

The story was similar with the public-sector unions. Perhaps the most dramatic incident occurred in December 2002, when Roger Toussaint, the radical president of the Transit Workers Union, threatened to strike rather than accept changes in work rules that would allow, among other things, subway cleaners to change light bulbs and do minor painting. Placed in a similar situation, Giuliani had made clear how much damage he could do to the union under the law; Bloomberg, instead, spoke plaintively of how much damage the union could do to the city. "A strike," he said, "would be more than inconvenient. It would endanger human life and devastate our economy." Toussaint largely got his way.

The pattern of behavior that Toussaint capitalized on had been set earlier. In what he declared to be a new "partnership" between the city and its public-sector unions, Bloomberg had announced, before even sitting down to bargaining sessions, that he would do everything he could to avoid layoffs. Where Giuliani had restrained hiring through a vacancy-control board, Bloomberg quickly abolished the board. Where Giuliani had used the threat of privatization to win concessions from unions, Bloomberg promised to avoid such measures wherever possible. He also made no effort to renegotiate the unions' health, benefits, and pension plans, all of which are far more generous than similar plans in the private sector and in most other big cities.

In exchange for this new spirit of cooperation, Bloomberg expected good will from the other side. Naturally, it never materialized. But the mayor's naive expectation was costly, causing him to wait almost a year before imposing any kind of serious controls on hiring and spending. The results were devastating for the city's overall financial health. Where Giuliani reduced spending by 3 percent in his inaugural year, Bloomberg increased spending by almost as much—increments that amounted to much more than peanuts in New York City's massive budget. As the Manhattan Institute's E.J. McMahon has noted, if Bloomberg "had duplicated Rudy's spending restraint in his first two fiscal years, the city would now be spending about $2.5 billion less, and most of Bloomberg's tax and fee hikes wouldn't have been necessary."

That Bloomberg has, in fact, closed the city's budget gap primarily through those "tax and fee hikes" has been especially galling to many who supported him. Bloomberg ran for office on a ringing pledge of no new taxes, confirming this in his first speech as mayor when he warned that higher taxes would only "drive people and business out of New York." But within a year, he had sharply raised cigarette, sales, and income taxes. Over the noisy protests of middle-class homeowners in every borough, he also pushed through a whopping 21-percent increase in the property tax. All of these hikes, insisted the mayor of a city that was already the most taxed in the nation, were unavoidable.

BY THE last quarter of 2003, Michael Bloomberg had achieved the unhappy distinction of possessing the lowest approval rating ever held by a modern mayor of New York. To explain his deep unpopularity, it is not enough, though, to catalogue his policy missteps. Bloomberg is disliked, even hated, not just because of what he has done but perhaps in equal measure because of how he has done it.

A self-made man who has accumulated a personal fortune of $4.5 billion, Bloomberg possesses an overweening self-confidence, acting at times as if it were demeaning to have to explain himself to others. Plainly, he is someone accustomed to having his word taken as law. But City Hall is a very different place from the boardroom, and rarely has a mayor shown himself, by temperament or forethought, to be less prepared to govern a major city.

Like Bloomberg, Giuliani had never held elected office prior to his victory in 1993. But Giuliani had spent years in the public sphere as a federal prosecutor. More important, he had already made one

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unsuccessful run for mayor, and after his defeat had gone to work studying every aspect of city policy. Once elected, Giuliani was single-minded in the performance of his job, immersing himself for eighteen hours a day in the details of government operations while at the same time keeping the big picture in sight.

What has stood out with Bloomberg, by contrast, is his aloofness, not just from the city (he often quietly escapes by private jet for weekends at his home in Bermuda) but from city government itself. Unlike his predecessor, he has neither taken a direct hand in running the city's maze of bureaucracies nor tried to give specific guidance to his appointees. Moreover, for a hard-headed businessman who now presides over a budget larger than that of all but eight states, Bloomberg can seem appallingly naive. When he insisted (to guffaws) that "corruption, waste, and meaningless programs hardly exist in city government," he was declaring himself content with business as usual, and essentially denying that the city faced any sort of crisis.

For a great many New Yorkers whose wonted relationship to their mayor is visceral and intimate, this detachment has been too much to bear. Time and again, Bloomberg has proved that he simply does not understand average New Yorkers or empathize with their travails. As the possibility of a subway strike loomed, he dragged reporters along to watch him buy a $600 bicycle, and suggested that others should meet their transportation needs in the same way. At a time when middle-class New Yorkers were outraged by his tax hikes, he jauntily told an elite Manhattan business group that the city was "a high-end product, maybe even a luxury product." Further stoking the anger of his critics, he jibed that he, for one, was perfectly willing to pay higher taxes.

Has Bloomberg learned anything from the rocky first years of his tenure? Perhaps. In his State of the City address this January, he seemed intent on relaunching his mayoralty with an appeal to New York's outer boroughs. The highlight of the speech was a proposal to issue a $400 rebate against the huge property-tax increase he had imposed. Striking, too, was the tone of the address, with its stress on crime control and the city's quality of life—clear echoes of Giuliani's priorities. For the first time, the mayor seemed to be talking to—instead of at—voters.

What remains unclear is whether Bloomberg now understands the deeper issue for New York: the enduring and now-desperate need to shrink and reform the city's bloated public sector. If nothing else, he has certainly placed himself on a collision course with the unions, virtually all of whose major contracts are up for renegotiation this year. Working to close an estimated $2-billion deficit—and, thanks to his proposed rebate, with less money at hand—he has stipulated that any salary increase will have to be paid for by improvements in productivity. Needless to say, this position is fiercely opposed by the unions.

The grim reality facing New Yorkers concerned about the future of the city is that the billionaire incumbent, an accidental mayor who seems to have run for office primarily to test himself with a new challenge, may be their best hope among the available alternatives. Since the defeat of the initiative for nonpartisan elections, Left-liberal rivals have been making ready their campaigns. They include Fernando (Freddy) Ferrer, an ally of Al Sharpton who almost won the Democratic mayoral nomination the last time around, and Gifford Miller, the speaker of the City Council and a young and willing accomplice of the city's spending interests. In short, Bloomberg could well be defeated in 2005 by a candidate backed by and ready to accommodate the same interests that are slowly strangling the city and driving away its middle class.

It is hard to exaggerate the danger of such a relapse. Bloomberg is fond of reassuring audiences that "smart people have to be here if they want to be successful." This, however, has become less true with each passing year, especially as New York's costs have risen in relation to those of its competitors. The last recession set a telling precedent. Usually the city and the region rise and fall together, but this time New Jersey and Connecticut, which have diversified their economies by attracting industries once based overwhelmingly in New York, recovered quickly—and left the city behind.

Behind the sparkle and dynamism of today's New York is the mundane fact that, with the exception of San Francisco, no other American city has lost residents at a higher rate over the past several years. Poor and ill-educated immigrants have continued to flow into the city, while highly skilled people with intellectual capital continue to decamp for places that offer them more and tax them less. For the city's Democratic politicians and the public employees they represent, this may be good news; the middle class has always been the chief political obstacle to their hold on power. For New York City as a whole—even for those precincts of it inhabited by the likes of Michael Bloomberg—such news is a portent of dark days ahead.

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On Joining the Jews

Nancy Yos

IT WOULD be wonderful to believe that everything we do, we do for reasons of perfect self-knowledge and complete autonomy. It would be wonderful to think that we are all finished characters, and wholly self-motivated. It would be pleasant to think that I, a suburban-Chicago Catholic, decided to convert to Judaism at the age of twenty-seven because of, and only because of, my deep inner convictions.

That is true in part. But there is no denying that I converted as well because, as a late-20th-century American, I could. Anyone can: there is no Gestapo here, no Inquisition, no law to tell you no. For that matter, there is no Sanhedrin. I have read that one-third of all Americans change their religion at least once in their lives. *At least* once. So nobody is unique, and some of us are twice as unique as the rest of us.

My antennae were, I think, up and functioning at an early age. In 1976, I paid attention to Entebbe, though the news of it got lost amid our national bicentennial celebrations on that Fourth of July weekend. I was eleven. Not long afterward, I read Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* five times in succession. I remember soaking up every detail my sixth-grade teacher told us about Chanukah. Then, as now, there was always some new crisis erupting in the Middle East, and in the throes of each crisis I would search the newspaper for photographs of Israeli soldiers and notice how handsome they all seemed to be.

Trite affairs, as befitted my age. By coincidence, I also had a favorite book in those days, one that was hardly trite and not at all Jewish but, in its way, thoroughly American. It was, of all things, *Bulfinch's Mythology*, that splendid compilation of the classic Greek and Roman myths as rendered by Thomas Bulfinch (1796-1867), Harvard man and accountant in the Boston Merchant's Bank. The edition I had borrowed from my elementary school's library was two inches thick, full of eye-popping black and white illustrations. Here were my first Aubrey Beardsleys, and the horrid bloody Goya of *Saturn Devouring his Children*, and a print of a rumpled and smirking *Nemesis* by Albrecht Dürer. Here was dignified old-fashioned type, and a cellophane wrapper that crackled beautifully when the book was opened by earnest childish hands.

In *Bulfinch's*, Apollo eternally chases Daphne, who is always just on the point of becoming a tree. Diana is always dashing water into the face of Actaeon before changing him into a stag. Latona everlastingly raises her arms, probably milk-white, to supplicate against the rustics muddying the pool in Lycia. And of course the gods are always coming down to earth and mating with nymphs and maidens; and when the nymphs and maidens ask to see their divine lovers, they are consumed in a flash of light.

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I loved *Bulfinch's*. I hated church.

My parents, both of whom were of mixed background (each had a Catholic mother and a non-believing and/or Protestant father), tried heroically to create for us a Catholic home and Catholic patterns of worship. I gather that this had been easier for them in the 1950's, when there were only three or four or five young children, than it became in the 1960's and 70's, with seven. My older siblings came tripping home from Catholic schools trailing holy cards and rosaries and wearing those shiny-banged haircuts of children in mid-century photographs. In another decade or so, the atmosphere would change. The reforms of Vatican II stripped all the "mystery" and all the Latin out of the faith my parents knew. I remember their impatience at the interjection of Protestant hymns into worship, their disgust at prayers offered during Mass (sometimes in fun) for Notre Dame's football team, and their disdain for co-parishioners who harangued them that a true Catholic loved the Kennedys.

Of the seven of us children, we last three attended public schools, although we were also taken to church and Sunday school, and prepared for the sacraments. I hated church. I could better imagine Apollo's fiery chariot shining down on the church roof, or the blood of the nymph Lotis dripping from a flower I might have picked, than anything going on at the altar having a shred of significance in life. (And yet, perhaps all along, *Bulfinch's* was preparing me to see, years on, "the sacred in the everyday.") At the age of fourteen I gathered up my courage and refused confirmation, the very last sacrament one makes in a Catholic childhood. I did not believe in God, and anyway I intended to go to church no longer. I told my parents this, quaking, and was gigantically relieved to hear my mother say, "Well, I'm not surprised," while my father went into the bathroom and splashed cold water on his face.

I was never confirmed. But in a few months I did begin attending a Catholic high school (the local public school had notorious drug problems). There, for the first time, I took religion classes outside of a church setting. I also had my first experience of the "higher criticism," or what the dictionary defines as "the study of the authorship, dates of writing, meaning, etc., of the books of the Bible" using the techniques of modern, secular scholarship.

In giving us this, our teachers must have figured that we would soon be in the hands of college professors who hated all religion, especially Catholicism, and they were no doubt trying to fight fire with fire. With honesty and perhaps some trepidation, they told us things that I did not think mattered much to me, since as far as I was concerned the tale of God in my life was over. The gospel accounts of Jesus' birth, they said, had been made up to make him seem like a god; ancient people needed that. There was no star of Bethlehem, there were no shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. Christmas was the pagan Roman Saturnalia, Easter the northern European festival of spring. Jesus did not feed 5,000 people with two fish, or raise anybody from the dead (the implication seeming to be that he had more important work to do). On the other hand, we were assured, he would still come back himself, even after an absence of 2,000 years; we were not to doubt that. And he cured the woman of her hemorrhage: in an all-girls school, a woman suffering a twelve-year period was something we could appreciate.

They also told us that Jesus was an observant Jew from a Jewish world, and at Passover we held a mock seder. This might not seem such earth-shattering information to have imparted, but for me it was more germane than the news that the New Testament was filled with as many impossibilities as *Bulfinch*. Now we were getting somewhere—getting to history. But my question was: all right, so he was not a Christian; but why a Jew? Was there something extraordinary about this people, such that their teenage girls—our teachers told us Mary was probably our age when God came to her—got to provide the messiah? "Mary said 'yes,' and to that the world owes everything," one of the nuns had assured us during a school Mass.

This was in the early 1980's. The Israelis destroyed the nuclear reactor in Iraq, and then they went after the PLO in Lebanon. An older sibling of mine, who had the best education in the family, watched an episode of *Nightline* with me one night and to my surprise grumbled approval of both actions. My own opinions must have been quite in flux around then: we had to keep a journal for religion class, and I know I wrote furiously in it one day about the sufferings of the Palestinians at the hands of their oppressors, the new Nazis.

In time I graduated from high school, worked a bit, and found love and got married. I even went to college for a while, where my high-school training stood me in good stead. Even though I enrolled in no class actually called Religion, my professors did pick up where the nuns and lay teachers had left off. Moses may not have existed, they confided, the Red Sea did not part, the Ten Commandments

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were based on Ugaritic lord-and-vassal treaties, the Catholic Church derived its entire authority from a pun on the word "peter," meaning "rock." And so on.

A strong and true faith should be able to coexist with such revelations of "reality," but the emotional implications that young people are asked to absorb with the revelations are of a different order. The higher criticism, in all its guises, does not say, Let us look for the truth together. It says, We have only to prove the origins of a thing to prove that it is stupid. I remember a professor of literature saying something like, "We must learn to live without answers." Perhaps I was never the type to live without answers. In any case, there seems to have been something about college, and the rigidity with which it delivered dicta on topics a humbler school had been willing to question, that drove me back to church.

PART OF my decision to return was, I hope, simple maturity, part of it reason. I reasoned that I had no right not to believe, when I had lived a very fortunate life while many other people in this world suffered terrible things and still believed. Anne Frank was a believer. Who did I think *I* was? I had thumbed through the Bible enough to come across Isaiah's point that the pot does not quarrel with the potter who made it. Besides, my husband and I had children by now. I wanted to be able to tell them something should they ever ask, "Mommy, what religion am I?"

And part of the reason for my going back to church was that I had read another very good book. This was a romantic women's novel called *In This House of Brede*, by the English author Rumer Godden. I was completely besotted with its depiction of a monastery of Benedictine nuns in England in the 1950's and early 1960's. What I loved about it was not so much the overly busy plot as the references to vast amounts of knowledge—collects, propers, commons, psalms, and the divines who studied and commented on them—and the depiction of a delicious medieval life of enclosure and calm as well as of a community of people who believe grand, unseen things and organize their days around them.

The sisters in *Brede* are contemplatives, and Brede is a "powerhouse of prayer." They do not "do" social justice. The greatest character in the book, the scholarly and crotchety Dame Agnes, takes time out from the divine office only once to listen, grudgingly, to a young priest from an active order who exhorts them all to change their ways, get out more, and help people. She calls him, privately, a "whippersnapper." What courage, I thought. What splendid self-possession.

Much intoxicated, I made the mistake of writing an article lamenting the glories I had missed in 26 years of Catholic living, learning, and sporadic church-going. Even as I was writing it, and then when it was (incredibly) published and three dozen or so people rapturously wrote and called me about it, I felt a dawning, stupid anguish. But I also followed *Brede*'s lead, reading, contemplating what I read, and, as I did so, being subtly led to a different destination.

I read particularly in the Hebrew Bible, which, I now noticed, the prayer-life of the nuns seemed to elevate to unusual importance. In one chapter, the sisters even sing aloud the Hebrew aleph-bet, reserved exclusively for part of the office for Holy Week itself. Where there is utmost holiness, this novel seemed to be suggesting, there is utmost Jewishness—although just a trace, parceled out sparingly, as if too much would be too threatening. Like the nymph consumed in a flash of light.

It was 1991, and there was another crisis in the Middle East: the Gulf war, Israelis interviewed live on television wearing gas masks. Adolescent synapses resumed their activity. The antennae that had once picked up Entebbe, and Chanukah lessons from a sixth-grade teacher, were buzzing constantly.

And now something peculiar happened. In church I began to notice how much of the Litany of the Virgin was devoted to expressions of praise like "Tower of David," and "Tower of Israel." How the first biblical reading at every Mass was from the "Old Testament." We were supposed to get meaning from obscure passages in Leviticus or Jeremiah that were written in another language for another people under other circumstances. In September, around the time of Rosh Hashanah, we prayed explicitly for the Jews: "first to hear God's word," as we noted on their behalf. I looked at the mammoth crucifix on the wall of my church and began to think, for heaven's sake, that's a Jew right there. Why? The nuns of *Brede* led a fabulous life, but it depended on their venerating a Jew. Why? Why not a Buddhist? Were we all in the wrong place, and doing the wrong thing?

IT WAS very important to me to know the answer to this. I began to compare the Old Testament with the New, its "supercessor." You must remember that, to a Christian, both books are holy, both revelation. In my supersaturated frame of mind I came across disturbing things—verses like "He will

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not abandon His people," "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent," "I am God, there is no savior beside Me," "This is My name forever," "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," "Pay no attention to the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you."

And then, in the New Testament, Paul writes letters that have been gleefully annotated by Christian editors as the "magna carta of Christian liberty." Liberty from what? Jewishness, evidently. Then what was the value of these Jewish origins to begin with? "The law causes man to sin," Paul says. No poor slob in any court of law could dare to present that as a defense of misdeeds, and yet, I thought in that supersaturated frame of mind, I was being asked to take this as holy scripture and the basis of life itself.

In the New Testament, Jesus himself says things that I now began to hear as equally disturbing—disturbing not in the sense of yeastiness, which is what the nuns of *Brede* would have taught me, but almost of horror. "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." "He who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God." "All things have been delivered to me by my Father." "They will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. . . . This generation will not pass away till all has taken place." "I am the first and the last, no man may come to the Father except through me."

Where was I? I loved my *Bulfinch's*, with its god-impregnated nymphs. I loved history, and its search for truthful origins. I loved *Brede*'s witnessing of the ultimate human happiness: obedience to the will of God. And, of course, I was a late-20th-century American. At some point in the middle of these peculiar happenings, I jumped the wall.

I believed then, and still do, that holiness exists. I believed, and still do, that nothing is more reasonable than that there should be one God Who demands moral behavior, and Who told somebody so. What I came to believe was that Christianity had grasped only the tail end of holiness, a smattering, an approximation—call it, brutally, a theft—of another people's experience. This other people really had met God and could prove it, through the sorts of proofs that swayed me: simplicity, reasonableness, endurance, history, writing, and the distance between their story and anything to be found in *Bulfinch's*. That the other great monotheisms have been, from their own beginnings, in such a tearing hurry to insist that much of Judaism is true, except what the Jews claim about themselves, also struck me, and still does, as excellent proof of humanity's significantly troubled conscience about the origins of divine things.

I tried to write another essay about all this—much too soon. As one intelligent reader pointed out, it didn't make much sense for me to be hungering and thirsting publicly after one religion and then, upon stepping out to get it, immediately starting to pursue another. In self-defense I can only suggest that my lament over my poor indoctrination in Christianity was not the same thing as faith itself. In any event, it turned out to be a goodbye.

I decided to convert. That sounds very lofty. I do think, though, that when you are twenty-seven, and your thinking is as obsessive as mine at the time, you cannot very well look off into the middle distance and speak the word "conversion" to yourself without doing something about it. God may not require all people to be Jews, but having come so far, you are certainly very likely to search and join and participate. This is perhaps uniquely true of Christians, who associate religion with an allegiance, and a building.

In the spring when I was twenty-seven, I attended, deliberately, my last Mass. Over the summer I began with great fearfulness to read, borrow, and buy Jewish books. I read Herman Wouk's *This Is My God*, and André Schwarz-Bart's *The Last of the Just*, and other large and impressive titles. I bought Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*. And I talked to my husband about it.

The spouses of people who change religions in mid-marriage will assuredly go straight to heaven when their time comes, unless they are simply taken up in a fiery chariot. He, product of a large Catholic family himself, his father's roots in Lithuania, his mother's in the Anglican church, was the soul of tolerance. You can read in a book called *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* the testimony of pioneer wives who, amid hardships, thank God for giving them Yankee husbands as opposed to other kinds—Southerners or Midwesterners. "But my husband was a Yankee and treated me gently," they say. I can avow that the breed, even of more recent vintage, has not changed.

I told him of my ideas and asked him if he wanted the children brought up Catholic even if I changed, and if so, was he willing to do that himself. No more a churchgoer than I had been when we first married, he said he did not believe in it enough for that. I asked him if he then minded if I brought them up Jewish—and by the way if he minded that we stopped eating pork chops. I

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thought I had better clear up some things right away. He said it was all right. I was under way.

I knew only enough about the denominations of American Judaism to understand that synagogues listed in the yellow pages with the sub-heading "Orthodox," "Conservative," or "Reform" were all of the same basic faith. Under "Orthodox," I proceeded to find three congregations. But, puzzlingly, they were in Harvey, Illinois, a black town, and they had strange African-Methodist-Episcopal words in their names. I assumed the yellow pages had it wrong. There was, if I remember correctly, one listing under "Conservative" and four or five under "Reform."

This last seemed the most promising subcategory. I wrote to the temple nearest my house, and received no reply. Knowing that it is the custom to hold potential proselytes at arm's length, I wrote again. When I again heard nothing, I wrote to the next nearest one.

This one answered—which is not to say that buildings talk but that the rabbi there was kindness personified, and the people to whom he introduced me, and who smoothed my path in the first weeks and months, were of his mold. For the next year and a half we met in his office every week or two weeks. He gave me more books to read, which I devoured, some happily (the more studious and fact-crammed, the better), and some impatiently—Albert Vorspan's humorous *Start Worrying*, for example. The proselyte has no sense of humor.

I attended Friday-night services. The first time, I remember vividly imagining that Christ Pantokrator, he of the giant mosaic portraits inside the domes of cathedrals in Ravenna, was going to rip off the roof of the temple, look in, and point me out as the fraud that I was. Whom did I think I was kidding? My first Sabbath candles consisted of an old red Christmas pillar and something else. It so happened that company barged in unexpectedly that very night and saw them. I don't remember what explanation I mustered.

Most of the time, though, I was in the convert's usual joyous transports. We are all the same. We jump in with both feet. Choosing an entirely new way of life is very exciting, like (my rabbi said) falling in love. Lacking Judaism's ethnic background, we jump in all the more heartily to its religious and ritual aspects, or try to. I have seen the earnest young man walk in on a Friday evening wearing both a yarmulke and ritual fringes; no sooner does he shake hands with the rabbi than he lets it be known that he has found the Jewish bookstores on Chicago's Devon Avenue and purchased the newest $400 seder plate in the window, that he already loves gefilte fish and knows which Hebrew month we are in.

For my part, I tried to wean myself from Saturday chores and do Sunday chores. I learned to make challah. I was thrilled to help out at the Sunday school's Chanukah dinner, and to disrupt my husband's schedule enough to take every adult-education class and attend every lecture on offer. Under the guidance of my kindly and learned rabbi, I read, studied, practiced a little, and thought. "You can only do something for the first time once," the rabbi was fond of saying, and I repeated that reassurance to myself whenever I lit candles or said a new prayer, though I very often felt that each time was still the first time.

Reading about a faith, and then going off to practice it in the local community, is a little like reading about a country and then going to live there. Herman Wouk's half-century-old *This Is My God* was not an accurate guide to a late-20th-century Midwestern Reform temple. Nor was Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, or S.Y. Agnon's *Days of Awe*. But I didn't know. So much of the convert's energies are, at first, metaphysical: you take your heart in your throat and do things, trying to believe you really are of the same line as King David and Maimonides—and Herman Wouk, too. Then you join the community and find that the people are lovely and gracious but not overwhelmingly metaphysical. They are not thinking of themselves in terms of David and the rest of the heroes, they are not trying to match their behavior to what you are reading in your books.

This is perfectly normal. But the convert, buzzing with joy and abnormality, may become a little confused. In looking back, it seems to me that just as my theological questionings were very much freighted with my Americanness—I wanted my new faith partly in the spirit that I would have wanted the right college major, or the perfect dress—so the greatest stumbling block to my new life as a Jew was this simple discrepancy between a faith born of private study and a born faith.

I had not only confusions but misgivings. The proselyte is ferocious. Among other things, I noticed Reform's intensely liberal politics—or anyway its intense politicizing. The nuns in *Brede* do not do politics; they pray. But over the last years, the Reform movement's leadership has approved gay marriage by simple voice vote at a convention somewhere, and has published a new Passover Haggadah in which we pray to God in feminine grammar—in

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Hebrew, over our heads, which I find a great piece of cynicism. We put an orange on the seder plate every year at the congregational Passover seder, to represent either women or lesbians, depending on which Ur-myth of the orange you choose. Not only my religious expectations but my family background offered rather awkward preparation for this.

The lovely, gracious people at many Reform temples listen equably to sermons affirming that "social action is the heart of Reform Judaism." I listened too, but not equably. Perhaps I had been reading too many tendentious books. I also could not help thinking that, for me, social action was awfully thin gruel to live on. What does it mean? Who defines it? It means collecting food for the hungry and homeless, certainly, but it never seemed to mean offering free ultrasounds in a trailer outside an abortion clinic so that the women going inside can see what is going on inside *them*. Quite understandable; that is not the movement's politics. But can other people's definitions of how to be good, how to "perfect the world," interfere between the soul and God? What then?

Finally, after getting accustomed to the natural human discrepancy between grand summaries of life and life itself, and then to a faith steeped in politics, I had to get accustomed to the scars that Orthodox and Conservative Judaism have left on the soul of Reform. I felt a little as a South Sea pagan might have felt who, coming to Christianity in the 1700's after having read a lot of medieval manuscripts, finds himself in a Dutch or Scottish church whose worshippers exult in the defiance of their newborn Protestantism. Reform Jews seemed to me still bubbling with such lively anger. There was the man who would acidly recall the time when women were supposedly not allowed to "look at" a Torah scroll in a Conservative synagogue. There was the woman still seething over her Orthodox upbringing—"I was afraid of my own shadow," she said, the bitterness further cankered by a memory of her parents sitting shiva for her when she married a Baptist. There was the woman who dwelled on the memory of dull Sabbaths spent "eating *cold* food!" Certain traditional practices that struck me as simply interesting, like counting a Torah scroll as the tenth in a prayer quorum that could only muster nine men, seemed to strike my new friends as abominations.

Where did it come from? My friends seemed both proud of and nervous about who they were. The pride was perfectly natural: the Reform movement was much older than they, and it had gotten its start, partly, by asking courageous questions of the tradition. But in the last couple of generations, the questions requiring the most courage have centered on recapturing aspects of the tradition the movement had turned away from. Hence, perhaps, the nervousness, and also the oddly theatrical nature of the pride. Were we really rejoicing with the Torah on the festival of Simchat Torah as we, men and women alike, born Jews along with their non-Jewish spouses, marched the scrolls around the sanctuary? Or were we rejoicing that the Orthodox would never do it this way?

After a decade of watching, it broke upon my obtuseness that I did not have a protestant bone in my body. Looking about me at the lovely and gracious people tapping their toes to the guitar music on a Friday night, I wondered what it could be like to feel a protestant's clean joy. I still wonder.

And yet I stayed—or perhaps I should say that, through their great kindness, they let me stay, no doubt seeing through me from the get-go. All in all, it was still the *core* of truth that was represented there. As for religious observance, Reform itself was beginning to edge closer in those years to recognizing the place of commandments in Judaism. And for my own part, I was still liberal and secular enough for the movement's general laxity to suit me fine. I might give myself airs, but did I pray three times a day, as the law commanded? Did I fast fully on Yom Kippur? I did not.

So I stayed, and I completed the process of a Reform conversion. I knew that there was once such an identity as the *ger toshav*, the person who admires Judaism but does not convert. But I had small children, and I could not imagine my saying to them, in answer to their question, "Well, gee, honey, you're a *ger toshav*, or the child of one, anyway."

I also knew that, in some respects, maybe in its deepest respects, my attachment to the faith so far was academic, and I wanted more: I wanted life. From everything I had read and observed and thought about, I believed it should be obvious to a blind man that when a people possessed of a simple and sensible worldview are promised by God that they will exist forever, and they do, then Something is happening. I wanted it understood that I was not such a fool as not to notice. I drove home from the temple one night crowing at the realization that I had just then, unselfconsciously, said "we" in company. I trusted it was a sign.

In the final stages of the conversion process my kindly and learned rabbi convened a Reform-style

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"court," which included among my three examiners a recently converted young man and an elderly woman whom I had been chauffeuring to services for a while. I don't mind saying that I was disappointed in the informality (to put it gently) of this gathering. I would have been happy to face elderly long-bearded rabbis, and answer pointed questions. A week later, the rabbi took me to the mikveh, the ritual bath, and I brought my children into the pool with me. My exceedingly patient husband came with us, not to immerse but for moral support.

After that modest *beit din*, and immersion in the mikveh, I stood on the pulpit during my conversion ceremony, with my dear long-suffering non-Jewish husband behind me, and I promised to remain faithful and to raise the children as Jews. Judaism has been the only faith our children have ever known. Things are consequential to them now, and to my husband, that never would have mattered if it were not for me.

Although it has taken me a disgracefully long time, from the experience of a new worship I have learned, slowly, the difference between a faith come from books and one drawn from life. And at long last, and almost unwittingly, I may have begun to learn some Torah—not just Basic Judaism, but Torah—which should have been the point all along.

At some point in the convert's "journey"—a foul word, for the convert wants to arrive, not to journey—there must come a time when he tires of self-absorption. It is like being an expatriate. For a long time the expatriate may get his thrills and even his identity from being brave and jaunty amid unfamiliar streets, from getting along as a stranger with new people in a new language. But after a while he must long not to be a stranger but simply a citizen, and to know not only that but *why* he is going to stay. Occasionally he may even ask himself whether he has at last earned the right to put something else besides an obsession with faith at the center of his life—orchids, or eminent Victorians, or something. Probably he will not.

I can only speak for myself. In the 16th century, St. Teresa of Avila, herself descended from Jews, once wrote that without poetry, life would be intolerable. I would change her sentence a little. I have found, twelve years after walking in off the street, and after all the books and all the cogitation and all the self-absorption, a people without whom life would be intolerable. Perhaps that is faith.

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When Skeptics Die

A Story

Yael Goldstein

THE OTHER day I was trying to catch a cab in the pouring rain in midtown, the umbrella I had purchased on a whim from an Ian Schrager hotel blown inside out, my cashmere sweater set so drenched that after it dried I would be able to donate it to one of the better-dressed poodles in my neighborhood. I waved madly at each passing cab, knowing the exercise was useless and that I was going to miss an appointment to get my hair done. The overpriced, inside-out umbrella was more hindrance than help, and it was pretty clear I ought to let it go—I had thought I was getting to be quite the pro at letting things go—but I kept a zealous grip on the silly smashed thing, sprinkled with the names of sleek pleasure domes from around the world. It had been at the Mondrian, in Los Angeles, that I acquired this umbrella, a business trip for me, though Richard had come along. We'd forgotten that it ever rained in LA.

I noticed that I had competition: another woman, effectively umbrellaed, had suddenly appeared with her arm thrust out to hail a yellow cab. I turned to glare at her, and she at me, and we realized at roughly the same moment that we knew each other. About fifteen years ago, in Cambridge, we had belonged to the same circle of friends, all of us graduate students. We used to give weekly dinner parties as proof that we'd grown up. We were all connected to Harvard or MIT or BU, and most of us actually lived in down-scale Somerville rather than Cambridge. The most distinct memory I could attach to her was that she had once made a Sumerian feast (she claimed it was, anyway) as a send-off for an Assyriologist acquaintance of ours who'd struck it big with a job at Chicago's Oriental Institute. There'd been grilled quail, boiled leeks, something extraordinary with white beans, and hand-stuffed grape leaves. It had been very impressive, even if no one could verify that any of it was actually Sumerian.

Clearly a woman of far-flung ambitions. She had been a flirt, too, if memory served. We were all more or less temporarily paired—at least for me it had been temporary, a fellow graduate student in English who never finished his dissertation and turned misogynist when I managed to get mine done and land a plum job—and she used to play up to the male contingent, basking in their attention. Her field had been psychology, and I used to wonder, as she tossed her silky mane in the direction of some man, how she could have so little self-awareness.

"It's really you, isn't it?" we laughed, and she, to my surprise, gave me a quick hug. Our acquaintance hardly merited the gesture, though maybe I'd forgotten the degree of our friendship, a lot of memories having blurred over for me. I pulled hurriedly out of her embrace and then, the initial jolt of recognition over, we sized each other up, trying to

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measure what the intervening years had wrought. My friend, at roughly forty, looked oddly girlish, still the wide-eyed waif, the mane still long, though limp with the weather. Perhaps it was the rain, I thought, melting away her maturity and accomplishments. Of course, I had to wonder what she saw when she looked at me. I like to think that I've outgrown questions of that sort, but there's nothing like having an old acquaintance emerge from out of the anonymity of a drowning midtown street to make you wonder what they're seeing in seeing you.

It turned out that for the past few years we'd been living two blocks apart on the Upper East Side. I said that was the sort of thing that could only happen in New York, and we exchanged those sorts of ready-to-mouth comments on the city's demonstrable superiority over all other locales, congratulating each other on having had the good sense to settle here. She was originally from Boston, I remembered now. She was the only one in our little circle who wasn't a transplant.

WE HAD ducked into a coffee shop by now, and were both distractedly patting the damp out of our clothes while the waitress cleared a table. The space was overheated and crowded, umbrellas dripping next to every seat. I was still gripping my mangled specimen. There was a strong smell of wet wool. The waiters seemed a little panicky, bumping into each other and the customers as they wound their way around bodies and chairs. I kept thinking that I really ought to call the hair salon and tell them I couldn't make it; I didn't want some snooty young receptionist acquiring a grudge against me.

When we finally slid into a booth my friend leaned languidly against the back of her bench and the expansiveness of the gesture seemed to indicate that she had all the time in the world. She ordered a soup and a sandwich from the waitress without even asking whether I had the luxury of sitting through an entire meal. I was beginning to remember why we'd lost touch in the first place when suddenly she said, in a strange, quiet voice that was somehow more forceful than her usual one, "I once knew a girl who liked New York only because it was unfamiliar."

"Was this a patient of yours?" I asked distractedly. I had noticed while she was speaking that there was some sort of commotion at the door—an old man was trying to bring a large, wet golden retriever into the restaurant—and I was much more interested in seeing how that situation would play itself out than in this conversation, which seemed to me to be quickly losing steam. I was beginning to resent having allowed myself to get netted into this encounter. I wondered how she had manipulated it. My friend's field, I remembered now, had been behavior modification. She had gotten her doctorate in clinical manipulation.

"No," she said. "It was my sister. You remember my sister? The scientist?"

The man with the dog left without much fuss. He hadn't looked like the sort who would throw in the towel so easily, and I was slightly disappointed in him. I turned my gaze back toward the woman across from me and put my mind to her question. Now that she mentioned it, I did remember this younger sister of hers; she'd been some sort of prodigy. Harvard at fifteen, junior faculty at MIT at twenty-two. She had never joined our circle, which made her, I remembered now, good material for her older sister's anecdotal talents. In fact, by the time our little dinner parties were petering out, I was pretty sick of hearing about this sister. As if we all didn't have enough trouble keeping ahead of the game without some wunderkind throwing us off balance.

"Oh, does she live in New York too?" I asked, not trying very hard to keep the exhaustion out of my voice.

"Not anymore. She was here for a very brief period, just long enough for it never to become familiar to her."

I didn't intend it, but my face must have slipped into skepticism, a look that Richard once described as indicating, "I'm not buying it, pitch it to me from another angle"; obligingly she tried again.

"It was having no memories here, I'm pretty sure. She told me that sometimes she'd pass a lonely stretch of street or an outdoor café filled with glossy-looking people, and she'd think, 'I have no memories of this spot or any like it,' and she'd feel OK for an instant. She tried very hard not to make any memories here by doing almost nothing with her time."

"Burnout?" I asked. It happened when you pushed too hard at a young age. I wondered, without much interest, what the stats were on prodigies, how many of them actually ended up doing something spectacular in their maturity. Maybe they were just like those girls who get chesty when they're ten and make the fifth-grade boys wild. By high school their breasts are just breasts.

I noticed that the man with the dog was back. He had a police officer with him, and I felt my faith in humanity's predictability restored. The guy had looked too ornery, with his eyebrows hanging

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into his eyes and scowl lines that were decades-deep, to submit without a quarrel. The restaurant manager—an elderly Hispanic who looked as weary as I felt—was talking quietly to the pair.

"Her husband died."

"Oh," I said, startled to hear those three terrible words stated so baldly. I studied her face, but her eyes were downcast and she seemed not to feel me watching her. She was playing with the napkin holder, opening and closing the dispenser. I thought again that I really ought to call the hair salon. The police officer was laughing now, and so was the manager, but the old man with the dog looked ready to do violence. It occurred to me that you never really hear about the elderly committing violent crimes. Perhaps at a certain point even the energy for rage is drained out.

"They'd been married only a year. They'd known each other less than two." She'd stopped fiddling with the napkin holder, and was now just looking at me. I thought she was going to change the topic. I didn't know whether I wanted her to or not. I tried to remember whether I'd ever even seen this sister of hers. I had a very distinct image of her, but it might just have been constructed over the course of hearing so much about her. I pictured a scrawny, prepubescent figure, with her sister's luxurious tresses lassoed in a ponytail, and the same delicate prettiness hidden behind owlish glasses. Yes, I was probably just constructing my image of her out of tired clichés. "But they were madly in love. You could feel their happiness in the air whenever they were around."

"How did he die?" I asked rather hurriedly, embarrassed by the cloying element my friend had just inserted into our already overly humid air. But it was the natural question to ask.

"Car accident. He was on the interstate coming home after a conference. There was a big rainstorm, he skidded off the road."

"How gruesome," I said. It wasn't a very sensitive choice of words, I realized after I'd spoken, not exactly gleaned from the empathetic-guidelines list. But my friend surprised me.

"It *was* gruesome," she agreed. "And so was my sister's reaction. Of course, we all expected it to be difficult for her, but we never expected it to be so eccentric." "Eccentric" hardly came out of the guidelines, either. "The thing was that, at first, she took it very well. She cried, but not that sort of uncontrolled sobbing that makes you want to flee, sympathy be damned. She made all the funeral arrangements, burial, everything, did it all herself. But then at the memorial service a few weeks later, when she got up to deliver the eulogy, instead of speaking, she just stood there and stared. Just stared at all of us, blankly, as if she had no idea what she was doing there. After a few minutes like this—I don't know, could it have been that long? It felt like even longer—she got down very calmly and walked out the back door. We all thought she'd gone to the ladies' room to start her real sobbing at last, but when we came to look for her she was gone and so was her car. She drove to New York that night, and she stayed here for six months, just burying herself in the unfamiliarity of it. I don't even think she read. We were in contact, but she asked me, asked all of the family, not to visit."

"She couldn't come to terms with his death," I said in a facile way that surprised even me. My friend gave me a searching look, perhaps wondering that I could respond so glibly to this tale that was clearly causing her some anguish to relate. I shifted uneasily in my booth, and the mangled umbrella that I had been holding between my knees clattered to the floor. At the same time that I was thinking how pat I had just sounded, I was also thinking with real urgency that I *needed* to call the salon, as if my hairstylist was a worried mother, frantic that I might be lying injured in the street somewhere. But my friend had positively trapped me in this booth. I wondered if she told this same story to everyone, and what her motive might be. There was something in the way she was carrying on that made me think of a scene I'd once witnessed in a park: a group of children, they could have been siblings, were dancing to some street music, but looking as if they'd rather be doing almost anything else.

"Couldn't come to terms with his death?" She rolled that over in her mouth neutrally. "No, that wasn't it at all. His death she could come to terms with just fine. It was her *loving* him she couldn't get past."

I had been gazing around the restaurant, wondering how many of these people were similarly pressing on in conversations for no reason other than the rain, but now I looked straight across the table at her.

"That seems strange," I said, and even, I thought, far more gruesome than dying on the side of a highway.

"Well, she never really could understand it. I mean, it didn't make *sense* to her—good, rational sense—and sense was the only thing she believed in."

Now I was remembering some other facts about

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this sister, stories my friend would regale us with at our dinner parties. She'd always had this tendency to reveal too much. It was a kind of psychological hijacking, I had decided, this forcing of intimate facts.

Anyway, the younger sister was beginning to assume a rich remembered form: the little prodigy, I recalled, had been an almost fanatical atheist from about the age of five, which was a strange thing to be in the household of an Orthodox rabbi. Over Sabbath lunches with nice women from the synagogue she used to get up on her chair, all three feet of her, and give speeches about *sense* and *reason* and *evidence* until she was blue in the face. I don't know too much about the Orthodox, having grown up as one of those Jews who think that God's primary commandment is to eat bagels and smoked salmon on Sunday, and I remember being surprised to hear that this was something they would tolerate. They probably indulged her because she was such a sad and lonely child. Or was she? I don't remember my friend ever telling me that, but I'd always assumed it was true.

"Was he a religious man?" I asked, trying to put together these pieces of information.

She seemed to think it was a strange question. "Religious? No, it's funny you should say that, though. You see they first fell in love because they were both such skeptics. *Rabid* skeptics, is what she would say. They met at a conference, all because she overheard him make an atheistic joke. He was advising an engaged friend to cut down on strife and be married as a Hindu, his girlfriend's religion. He said, 'What do you care which God you don't believe in?' She thought it was very clever. She never would have approached him otherwise, because she was, you know . . . well, at these conferences she was quite the star."

Oh, it was all coming back to me: the small article in the *Times* I'd clipped for some reason, then thrown out, the long story in *Boston Magazine* I couldn't bring myself to read. She was quite the star all right. Tiny goddess of science. Of *neuroscience*. I was remembering it all.

"Was he a scientist, too?" I asked.

"No, that was part of the problem. He was a philosopher. He worked on consciousness."

"Oh," I said, because I did not at all get the significance of this fact. It sounded like a funny thing to work on.

"That first night they met, they spent hours talking in the hotel lobby. Turned out they'd both been the children of rabbis, both escaped breathless into the realm of reason and evidence. Both lived in Cambridge, for God's sake. It all made such perfect sense. It was the world showing itself once again to be eminently rational."

"Sounds lovely," I said. I realized with some surprise that my thoughts were drifting to the night I'd met my own husband. I hadn't thought about that night in years, and once again I had the feeling of being the victim of psychological hijacking. Still, hijacked or not, there was a very pleasant feeling spreading through me while I let my thoughts drift over the details. We were both book editors, and he'd caught my eye from across the room at a crowded party in another editor's townhouse. I was talking to a group of people I had never met before, being pretty new to the business. I had walked away from my tenure-track job in Yale's English department after only a year, having gotten it into my head that I could better serve literature by going into publishing. Richard was standing alone in front of some bookshelves, studying the titles. He was wearing a cheap suit that fit him badly, and he was leaning over so that he could read the titles on the bottom shelves. It looked like a painful position, his neck jutting out sideways from his hunched shoulders.

He was very tall, painfully thin. He pulled out a book and I could see—I had wandered over so that I was standing just a few feet behind him—that it was an early book by one of my own authors. Those were the days when I was still doing books by authors like that, before the self-help craze and the discovery that I had a talent for knowing which warmed-over *bobbe mayses* would turn big profits. The man at the bookcase looked to be as old as my father (it turned out he was three years younger), but there was something about the way he was holding the book—as if it were something sacred—that made me feel very protective toward him. Not even I, back then, had that sort of exaggerated reverence toward the books I worked on. But Richard's obvious feeling for the object in hand was moving, it was endearing, and it was also slightly deforming, like a hunchback's hump. I remember thinking precisely that as I reached out and touched him gently on his bony shoulder and introduced myself. That warm and intimate gesture still mystifies me, but if I hadn't stepped so completely out of character for that one moment, who knows whether any of the rest of it would have followed? I had somehow already committed myself to gestures that weren't like me at all.

"WELL, IT was lovely for that one night," my friend was saying. "But the next day, after her own big talk, she went to hear his small

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one. She was one of only about ten in the room, and so she couldn't hide her reaction very well, which was embarrassing for her. You see, the talk was an attack on just the sort of work she did. He was one of those philosophers who think science can't get to the heart of consciousness, that there's something in our experience that won't be explained by explaining which neurons fire when. And she was one of those neuroscientists who think they're a few years away from unlocking every last secret the mind can yield. Every time he said the word "neuroscience"—*naive* neuroscience, *oversimplifying* neuroscience, *overconfident* neuroscience—she thought she could hear him saying her name instead. But it wasn't so much what he thought of her work that upset her. What upset her was that she considered his ideas a flim-flammy web of ignorant prejudices and primal fears."

Her voice had modulated as she said those last words. She sounded as if she was quoting, and I asked her if she was.

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact I am," she answered. "Those were more or less my sister's words. Also that he spoke with a look of dumb wonderment on his face, the sort of look our father used to get when he spoke about the Talmud and God's law. To escape the irrationality of religion for *this*—what was the point, what was the difference? Coddling mysteries, purposely trying to add things to the ranks of the unknowable—I'm quoting again—that was the attitude she was at war with. She felt betrayed."

My friend had apparently finished with her soup, having gently pushed away her bowl with her two upraised hands in a gesture that seemed to say "enough," and I excused myself to go to the bathroom. It was grimy but smelled alright, and I took several deep breaths. Then I called the hair salon to schedule a new appointment. The receptionist sounded fine with my change of plans. When I returned to our table my friend was sitting just as I'd left her, and whatever had been gripping at my chest these past few minutes had passed. I settled back into the mist-heavy atmosphere, returning the Schrager umbrella to safekeeping between my knees, and asked what had happened next.

"Well, the thing was that even after she discovered that their respective work was so incompatible, she still found herself drawn toward him, maybe even stronger than before. They got involved and then, at some point, he spoke to her about the afterlife of skeptics."

I'd been watching a young couple make their entrance, laughingly shaking off the water, glowing in the full possession of their healthy animal spirits—Richard and I had missed out on all that—and so I wasn't sure I'd heard her right. "The what?" I asked.

"The afterlife of skeptics."

"Is that a book?" It sounded like something my imprint would publish: *The Afterlife of Skeptics: Find Belief in God in 9 Simple Steps*.

"No, it was a theory of his. Or maybe it was a metaphor. I don't quite know. But she became obsessed with it after he died."

"But what does it mean, the afterlife of skeptics?"

"That even after skeptics die, they reason the way they'd always reasoned in life: based on all we know about the physical world, they say to themselves, no part of a person could possibly survive the death of the body. Wherever it is they've gone—paradise, the great beyond, the big white light—they simply can't believe they're there. They act as if they don't exist, because by their logic they don't. They continue to molder in mock nonexistence forever, just feet from bliss. Paradise is all around them and they're just too stubbornly rational to see it."

"Some pillow talk," I joked. My friend didn't smile. In fact, I was pretty sure that her large waif eyes were unnaturally glistening. Those sorts of eyes always have a suggestion of sadness in them. Even when she had been so determinedly amusing at our old dinner parties, telling her anecdotes and tossing her hair, her eyes had seemed to offer a contradicting subtext. And of course now there was every reason for them to look as sad as they did. I thought of asking her to stop telling this story, but whichever way I tried phrasing it in my head, the request sounded cruel.

She was fiddling with the mustard cap, ignoring her sandwich. "When my sister was going through her . . . New York phase, she spoke a lot about the dead skeptics. She said she felt like their kin. She had always taken a lot of pride in her skepticism, but now it made her feel terrible. It made her doubt whether the two of them had ever really loved one another."

"But why?"

"Because it made no *sense*. It was illogical. He represented something vile to her. I'm not kidding." I must have made a face, thinking of murderers and rapists and child molesters as compared to a man dubious about the powers of neuroscience. "To her there was something positively unethical about an intelligent person who *liked* to be-

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lieve in the mysterious. She called it a crime against reason."

"But this only began to torture her *after* he died?"

"Well, yes," she said slowly. "In the presence of love, doubt can't maintain itself." It struck me that her pronouncement had a slightly theistic tinge to it. It was a kissing cousin to: in the presence of God, doubt can't maintain itself. Could she be quoting her sister again? I would have thought the neuroscientist would have disapproved of so metaphysical-sounding an assertion. I didn't think that *I* approved of it. Was its converse that doubting love was a natural response to losing love? That seemed plain absurd to me—juvenile, in fact. It made me wonder whether the little neuroscientist, or her older sister, for that matter, had ever learned the slightest thing about love. And a thought occurred to me that I used to have many times when I was still involved in academia: that only such smart people could have ideas that were so stupid.

I was looking around the restaurant now, in impatience. It had emptied out somewhat; either the rain was abating or people just had to brave it and get on with their lives. My young couple were still lingering. He was talking and she was intently listening. He looked like he was going on about something, expounding some view, and she looked fascinated, nodding solemnly from time to time, her expression trying to convey how well she understood and agreed with him.

My friend seemed to think better of her pronouncement and sighed, "I don't know, maybe the unlikeliness of their love did bother her while he was alive. Maybe she'd think about it from time to time, but then when she saw him and *felt* him around her, she'd let herself forget about it."

"So when he died . . . ," I prompted, because I knew that I should evince some interest in the next stage of the story. But I was also thinking about how often it is that you catch couples in this position, he expounding and she listening. The missionary position, I suppose you could call it. I glanced back at the couple and smiled slightly, my cynicism making the sight of them more bearable.

RICHARD HAD only once called me a cynic. We were standing in our red-walled library, between the shelves of books and the deep leather couches, all of which had been paid for with money that I, and not he, had earned. He was telling me about a poet he wanted to sign on, and I told him it was enough with the poets already, that the house just couldn't carry these delicate souls any longer, not even for the sheen of high culture they bestowed on the rest of us, and he called me a cynic, in his characteristically playful tone of voice but with something utterly unamused hovering above his crooked smile. We stood still for several moments letting the comment fill the air between us, and then the phone rang.

It was an important call and I had to take it, and when I came back to the library he was deeply immersed in a book, and I didn't want to disturb him. But for weeks the comment perched in my mind and heckled me at odd moments. It had never occurred to me before that he resented the way I spoke about books, breaking it all down to the bottom line. That was just the way we were: he with his little literary gems that never sold, and me with my *bobbe mayses* that pulled in a bundle and kept us comfortably housed and attired and libraried. And then I'd had an epiphany in a taxi, heading back from a long lunch with an author who was going to make us lots of money: it was wrong of Richard to hold my cynicism against me. I never held his impracticality against him. No one *chooses* to be a cynic, was what I had planned to tell him.

"Well, as I said, at first she was doing pretty well." My friend was picking at her sandwich, and looking me full in the face, searchingly, in a way that both baffled and annoyed me. "The problem began when she sat down to write the eulogy. What could she say about him? The defining fact about him, as far as she was concerned, was that she loved him, and she couldn't say why she did. He was a man who hadn't believed in her work. Their love had made no sense. It almost made more sense to her that he would die on the side of an interstate, driving home to her in a rainstorm. So she didn't write anything down, and when she stood in front of the audience she didn't say anything. That's when she moved here, and died a sort of death herself. She started mimicking the nonexistent."

"So what happened to her finally? How did she snap out of it?" No part of me resented the little prodigy any longer. In fact, I felt tender toward her, protective even, because if you can't help being a cynic, you certainly can't help being a skeptic, and what a thing it was to molder in mock nonexistence.

My friend was quiet for a while, examining her fingers. I began to feel irritated: if there is one thing I hate in a narrative, it's the lack of a proper ending, and I was particularly eager for some nice neat bow to be tied around this one. It dawned on me that the little prodigy hadn't snapped out of it at all—that she'd simply returned to Cambridge, to

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her lab, to her work, out of a sense of duty, or an attempt to trick herself into believing success was the same thing as life. Perhaps she was still moldering in mock nonexistence, piling up the awards and honors and neuroscientific discoveries like flowers on a grave.

But finally my friend said, "She was on the subway, just riding nowhere like she did every day. There was a man, she thought he was probably Puerto Rican, making eyes at her, being flirtatious. She kept trying to avoid his gaze, but finally he caught hers and held it. She realized he was making the face her husband would make when they were kidding around in bed, a sort of caricature of the leering man. It was the oddest thing, like seeing her husband peering out through unfamiliar features, and she couldn't look away. She was holding the gaze of this man in the most inappropriate way, completely stepping out of character for those few moments." My friend smiled weakly, her eyes glistening too much, and I smiled weakly back. Yes, I could see it quite clearly. "And then finally the man said, '*Chica*, open your eyes. Paradise is all around you.'"

Neither of us said anything else for a while after that. I was listening to the rain battering every inch of the city, and so, I'm certain, was my friend.

Finally I said, "I don't know if the news ever reached you, but I got married—to a man named Richard."

"Yes, of course I knew you were married."

"He died a year ago, almost to the day."

"I know," she said. "I heard."

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OBSERVATIONS

The Mind of George Soros

Joshua Muravchik

"I HAVE made rejection of the Bush doctrine the central project of my life," announced George Soros in January. "I am determined to do what I can," he added, to assure that President Bush is not reelected.

Coming from someone else, such statements might be written off as delusional, but Soros is a man with a record of achieving outsized goals. A financier who began with a stake of a few thousand dollars, he traded and speculated his way to a fortune of many billions, making him one of the world's richest men. Then he turned to philanthropy, an enterprise he undertook with so much largesse and so much panache that he quickly won a place for himself alongside the likes of Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller in the pantheon of legendary donors.

Soros has declared his intent to devote similar energy and single-mindedness to his new "project." Campaign-finance regulations may place stringent limits on donations to candidates—and now, with the McCain-Feingold law, to political parties as well—but they still allow unlimited donations to so-called "independent" political committees. According to reports last November, Soros had already pledged $18 million to three liberal anti-Bush groups of this kind, announcing that "If necessary, I would give more." As he sees it, "America, under Bush, is a danger to the world. And I'm willing to put my money where my mouth is."

This impassioned crusade may come as a surprise to some. Soros's fame rests not on his political commitments, after all, but on his achievements as "the world's greatest money manager" (a title bestowed on him by *Institutional Investor* magazine) and as the open-handed benefactor of the nations of the former Soviet bloc. As it turns out, however, there are other sides to the eccentric figure who has now decided to make his formidable presence felt in our electoral politics.

BORN IN Hungary in 1930, Soros began life as George Schwartz. His father, Tivadar, was from humble origins; his mother, Erzebet, from money. Both were Jews, but non-observant (she eventually converted to Catholicism). Once married, Tivadar had to work just two hours a day managing some of his wife's family property, which provided a handsome living for them and their two sons, Paul and George. At some point during the boys' childhood, the parents decided to change the family name and chose the Hungarian-sounding but in fact obscure Soros. It means "soar" (in the future tense) in Esperanto, the made-up, trans-European language promoted by those who dreamed of a world free of nationality. Tivadar was among its leading proponents.

The arrival of World War II had, at first, little effect on the privileged Soros family. The athletic Paul would later recall his main privation as the unavailability of Dunlop tennis balls; he had to make do with a brand of lesser quality. Although Tivadar procured American visas for his wife and sons, saying he himself would remain in Budapest, Erzebet refused to go.

But 1944 brought an ominous change. The Nazis, fearing for the

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loyalty of their ally, Admiral Horthy, the military dictator of Hungary, occupied the country and forced Horthy to replace his government with one more devoted to Hitler's goals. Adolph Eichmann soon arrived to oversee the liquidation of Hungary's Jews, a project over which Horthy had temporized. Now Tivadar secured false identity papers for each member of his family and dispersed them to various dwellings away from the family's own homes. In this manner, identified as Christians, all four survived the Holocaust.

Soon after the war it became apparent to Tivadar that Hungary's Soviet "liberators" were not going to withdraw but would instead impose a Communist regime. By 1947 he arranged for George, then seventeen, to leave for London, where some cousins were prepared to provide shelter. Nazi and Communist expropriations having taken their toll on the family's holdings, there was insufficient income to support George while abroad; studying at the London School of Economics (LSE), he sustained himself by working at odd jobs.

After finishing his degree, Soros found work at the London stock exchange. One thing led to another; in 1956, quite by coincidence, he was hired for a position on Wall Street. In America, he began to invest the money of friends and acquaintances as well as his own modest bankroll, and was soon turning a handsome profit. He set himself a five-year goal of building his fortune to a half-million dollars, a sum on which he imagined he might retire and devote himself to intellectual pursuits (which he always regarded as his true calling). As his returns exceeded his goals, he set his financial sights higher, evidently spurred less by greed than by pride in his flowering talent as a speculator and his love of the game.

Having already lived in two other countries, Soros had an eye for international trading. He pioneered maneuvers that exploited small variations from one country to another in the value of a given share or financial instrument. He had a sharp instinct for currency trading, and his specialty was the fast deal. As a recent *New Yorker* profile put it, he was "adept at finding tax loopholes and operating in gray areas where oversight is scant and maneuverability wide."

As late as the early 1980's, Soros was telling interviewers that he did not believe in philanthropy. He had already created the Open Society Fund, the first of what would become a constellation of foundations through which he was to channel his generosity. But the original motive, he explained, was not primarily benevolent. The fund was set up as what the law calls a charitable lead trust, which Soros described as "a very interesting tax gimmick" allowing him to pass large sums to his heirs untaxed.

Whatever the origins of his eleemosynary activities may have been, they eventually became his main passion. Turning over the management of his investment funds to deputies, he threw himself into charitable work with the same zeal he had once devoted to trading. His gifts made a big impact in the countries in eastern Europe in transition from Communism. In some of them, his largesse apparently exceeded the aid received from the U.S. government.

For the breadth and imagination of his giving, Soros has been widely, and deservedly, praised. A reviewer in the *New York Times* did not hesitate to call him "one of the great men of our times." Never shy about his own accomplishments, Soros has basked in this adulation. He calls himself a "stateless statesman." Referring to the region where he concentrated his philanthropy, he declares unabashedly that "the former Soviet Empire is now called the Soros Empire."

NEVERTHELESS, IT is neither for his charitable work nor for his financial wizardry that Soros wishes most to be recognized. Rather, it is for his intellectual accomplishments. From early on, as he would have it, he fully expected to become another Keynes or Einstein. At the London School of Economics, he studied economics but was fascinated by philosophy. He was especially taken with the work of the Anglo-Austrian philosopher Karl Popper, who was then on the LSE faculty and served, at least formally, as the young refugee's adviser. Soros likes to say that Popper's ideas about the "open society" and the fallibility of human knowledge have been the starting point for his own philosophical contributions.

These begin with the theory of "reflexivity"—his term for the notion that in human affairs, unlike in the world of inanimate nature, the observer is himself part of the universe that he is attempting to observe; thus, the very act of observation may influence the reality being analyzed. This insight has been, in turn, the basis for Soros's theory of history, which revolves around "boom-bust cycles." When a social enterprise of some kind—a business, a movement, a nation—is doing well, Soros argues, this creates a bandwagon effect that leads inevitably to overvaluation or overreaching, producing an artificial "bubble" that must eventually burst.

Alas, for all his aspirations, Soros has met with disappointment as a philosopher. He spent three years weaving his ideas into a book titled *The Burden of Consciousness* but left it unfinished when, as he confessed to his biographer, he himself could not understand on the morrow what he had written the day before. In lieu of that volume, he has presented excursuses on reflexivity in most of the half-dozen books he has published. These passages have repeatedly evoked exasperation from reviewers, who have found the idea both obscure and commonplace. But Soros has shrugged off these criti-

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cisms, commenting that his theory is "not yet properly understood."

As if to vindicate himself, Soros has said that his philosophical framework has "turned out to be very helpful to me in the financial markets"—a tantalizing claim and one that, undoubtedly, helps to explain the wide audience for his books. But the people who have worked closely with Soros see much more intuition than philosophy in his methods. As his son, Robert, who has taken over some of the family business, has observed:

> My father will sit down and give you theories to explain why he does this or that. But I remember seeing it as a kid and thinking . . . at least half of this is bullshit. I mean . . . the reason he changes his position on the market or whatever is because his back starts killing him. It has nothing to do with reason.

Nor, indeed, is it easy to detect the influence of Soros's philosophy on his philanthropic activism. One might assume that an understanding of "reflexivity"—that is, our supposed inability to stand apart from social phenomena and judge them in a dispassionate light—would demand a certain modesty in the rendering of practical judgments. But Soros has never hesitated to advocate sweeping change or to pursue grand political strategies, serenely confident in his own ability to discern the needed remedies for the ills of dozens of different societies and indeed for the world as a whole.

At some point in the late 1990's, after years of devoting himself to the former Communist world, Soros decided that his attention was required in America. His first major venture into domestic issues was in support of the campaign to decriminalize drugs. He credits the poet Allen Ginsberg, an apostle of sexual and chemical liberation whom he befriended in the 1980's, with having alerted him to the injustice of American drug laws. Aryeh Neier, president of the Open Society Institute, and a man sometimes described as Soros's "secretary of state," has explained the allegedly malicious intent behind our current drug laws in these loaded terms: "[C]riminalization is a strategy that buys into the notion that if you lock up enough young black males—for whatever reason—you will promote public safety." In line with such thinking, Soros has not only made possible various state ballot initiatives to legalize "medical" marijuana, but he has advocated such "reforms" as "making heroin and certain other illicit drugs available on prescription to registered drug addicts."

No less outré have been Soros's many pronouncements since the late 1990's on the state of the American and global economies. "Capitalism is coming apart at the seams," he declared at the time of the Asian financial debacle. Decrying the rise of what he called "laissez-faire ideology," Soros painted a picture at once apocalyptic and unoriginal:

> There has been an ongoing conflict between market values and other, more traditional value systems. . . . As the market mechanism has extended its sway, the fiction that people act on the basis of a given set of nonmarket values has become progressively more difficult to maintain. Advertising, marketing, even packaging aim at shaping people's preferences rather than, as laissez-faire theory holds, merely responding to them. Unsure of what they stand for, people increasingly rely on money as the criterion of value. . . . The cult of success has replaced a belief in principles. Society has lost its anchor.

And what remedies did Soros suggest? As a first step, the creation of an international central bank; in the long run, nothing less than a transformation of how the world itself is governed. "To stabilize and regulate a truly global economy," he wrote, "we need some global system of political decision-making." Though it was neither "feasible nor desirable" to "abolish the existence of states," Soros conceded, nevertheless "the sovereignty of states must be subordinated to international law and international institutions."

Two years later, with Asia's woes abating rather than spreading as he had forecast they would, Soros admitted to having "some egg on my face." But even as he acknowledged the error of his diagnosis, he clung fast to his far-reaching prescription. A world of globalized economics, he insisted, required something akin to globalized government.

Given this set of predilections, it is not hard to see how Soros would have been driven to paroxysms of frustration by the notoriously "unilateralist" Bush administration and the war in Iraq. As he explains in his new book, *The Bubble of American Supremacy*,* the United States has now fallen into "the hands of a group of extremists" whom he identifies as "neoconservatives" or "social Darwinists" and who espouse an "ideology of American supremacy." The only element missing from the "master plan" they hatched well before arriving in office in 2001 was a suitable pretext for action. For them, according to Soros, the attacks of 9/11 were therefore a godsend. "Communism used to serve as the enemy; now terrorism can fill the role."

As an alternative to the arrogance of American supremacy secured by means of military power, Soros proposes the "Soros doctrine." Through the good agency of the United Nations and our own foreign-aid efforts, he writes, we need to answer our enemies not with force of arms but with "preventive action of a constructive nature."

WHAT EXPLAINS this surpassing faith in the efficacy of international governance and institutions, espe-

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cially in light of the record of such institutions in recent years, not to say over the past century? Here one can only speculate, but at least part of the answer would seem to lie in biography.

It is surely not incidental that Soros's father was a devotee of Esperanto, with its grandiose and naive strategy for overcoming the fraught nationalist divisions of Europe. Soros himself, we know from his chroniclers, spent many an afternoon as a student in London propounding Esperantism at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park.

No less pertinent in this connection is Soros's problematic relationship to his own Jewishness. Though he often claims authority for his views by invoking his experience under the Nazis—he confided to the *Washington Post* that some of the things President Bush says "remind . . . me of the Germans"—he is strikingly aloof from his Jewish origins. None of his vast philanthropy has been directed toward Israel, and his coldness toward the Jewish state has on occasion shaded into outright hostility: in a speech last May to the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, Soros likened the behavior of Israel to that of the Nazis, invoking some psychological jargon about victims becoming victimizers.

It is not only Israel that Soros abjures but Jewish charities in general, an attitude he attributes to his observations of the *Judenrat*, or Jewish council, that the Nazis created in Budapest, for which he worked as a courier, and by a rather weird experience with the Jewish Board of Guardians during his years in London. If blaming Jewish organizations—or Israel—for the works of the Nazis is hard to fathom, his attitude toward the Board of Guardians is no more explicable. It seems he appealed to it for financial support after breaking a leg, but the board arranged instead for him to receive a British-government stipend. When he wrote an aggrieved letter deploring this as a tawdry way for "one Jew [to] treat . . . another in need," the board backed down and provided him with a cash allowance for the duration of his recovery. Later, he would confess insouciantly to his biographer the reason he had been so angry: he had already arranged to receive the government payment and had hidden this fact from the board in the hope of receiving duplicate benefits. It was, he said, "a double-dip," and one that "solved all my financial problems."

More remarkable still in this connection is Soros's frequent comment that 1944 was "the best year of my life." It is easy to see how a boy of fourteen might have been "excited" by the "adventure" of evading the Nazis with an assumed identity, as he says he was. But 70 percent of Soros's fellow Jews in Hungary, nearly a half-million human beings, were annihilated in that year. They were dying and disappearing all around him, and their numbers no doubt included many whom he knew personally. Yet he gives no sign that this put any damper on his elation, either at the time or indeed in retrospect.

"My Jewishness [does] not express itself in a sense of tribal loyalty," Soros explains. About this he is certainly correct. "I [take] pride in being . . . an outsider who [is] capable of seeing the other point of view." About this he is correct as well, if by "other" we understand "adversary." In any event, this flight from Jewish particularism into a willed universalism is itself a familiar reflex, if not a full-fledged syndrome, among many Jews in the modern era, one of whom, a Yiddish-speaking philologist, was sufficiently inspired by it to invent Esperanto. In Soros, it has been taken to a startling extreme.

Cold as he is toward the Jewish people, Soros is not much warmer toward his adopted country. "I had never quite become an American," he once said. Now he complains that today's America "is not the America I chose as my home," as if, by turning conservative and electing George W. Bush as President, the country has failed to live up to *him*.

The egoism of the remark is revealing. Soros has admitted to having "carried some rather potent messianic fantasies with me from childhood, which I felt I had to control, otherwise they might get me in trouble." Having made his mark, he now seems to give them free rein. He told one interviewer that he had "godlike, messianic ideas," and another that he sometimes thought of himself as "superhuman." To still a third he explained that his "goal is to become the conscience of the world."

This self-imagined messiah has now come to save the world from the America of George W. Bush and its war against terrorism. He is convinced that this is an unjustified war, contrived in response to events (the attacks of 9/11) that "should have been treated as crimes against humanity . . . requir[ing] police work, not military action." To say the least, it is a strange idea, and an even stranger role, for one who owes not only his immense fortune but also his freedom and even his life to America, and in particular to its willingness to confront those who have committed crimes against humanity with enough military force to defeat and stop them.

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OBSERVATIONS

Kandinsky's Mistake

Terry Teachout

ON JANUARY 2, 1911, a group of well-known Viennese musicians, including the soprano Marie Gutheil-Schoeder, a leading member of the Vienna Hofoper, and the Rosé Quartet, an ensemble led by the concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic, came to Munich to give a concert of the music of Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951). The program included the *Second String Quartet*, Op. 10 (1908), and *Three Piano Pieces*, Op. 11 (1909), the two works in which Schoenberg first broke decisively with tonality—that is, the system of harmonic organization that for centuries had served as the basis for Western classical music.

Reproduced in the printed program was a statement from Schoenberg's soon-to-be-published *Harmonielehre* ("Theory of Harmony"):

> Dissonances are only different from consonances in degree; they are nothing more than remoter consonances. Today, we have already reached the point where we no longer make the distinction between consonances and dissonances.

The concert, which was widely reviewed in the Munich press, was a *succès de scandale*. "There was no shortage of applause," one critic reported, "but there was plenty of laughter and cursing as well." Emil Gutmann, the impresario who organized the event, wrote to Schoenberg to tell him that "loud attempts at hissing were countered by extraordinarily loud applause."

Among those who applauded was the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), one of several prominent artists in the audience. Schoenberg's music made an overwhelming impression on Kandinsky, who drew two preliminary sketches of the performance on the spot or immediately thereafter. The next day, he completed a full-scale oil painting, *Impression III (Concert)*, in which performers and audience are dissolved into an all-but-abstract swirl of high-key color; at the center, a large black trapezoid represents the piano played at the concert.

Two weeks later, Kandinsky sent a letter to Schoenberg, whom he had never met:

> In your works, you have realized what I, albeit in uncertain form, have so greatly longed for in music. . . . I am certain that our own modern harmony is not to be found in the "geometric" way, but rather in the anti-geometric, anti-logical way. And this way is that of "dissonances in art," in painting, therefore, just as much as in music. And "today's" dissonance in painting and music is merely the consonance of tomorrow. . . . What we are striving for and our whole manner of thought and feeling have so much in common that I feel completely justified in expressing my empathy.

Schoenberg responded immediately and enthusiastically:

> I am sure that our work has much in common—and indeed in the most important respects: in what you call the "unlogical" and I call the "elimination of the

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> conscious will in art.". . . Every formal procedure which aspires to traditional effects is not completely free from conscious motivation. But art belongs to the *unconscious*! One must express *oneself*! Express oneself *directly*! Not one's taste, or one's upbringing, or one's intelligence, knowledge or skill. Not all these *acquired* characteristics, but that which is *inborn*, *instinctive*.

The two men did indeed have much in common, not merely in their work but in their lives—Kandinsky was a serious amateur musician, Schoenberg an equally serious amateur painter—and they thereupon embarked on a decade-long friendship. At Kandinsky's urging, four of Schoenberg's paintings were included in *Der blaue Reiter* ("The Blue Rider"), an influential exhibition of modern art held in Munich in 1911. Around the same time, Kandinsky declared in his treatise *On the Spiritual in Art* that "Schoenberg's music leads us into a new realm, where musical experiences are no longer acoustic, but purely spiritual. Here begins the 'music of the future.'"

RARELY HAVE two major artists working in different media become so close, or taken so deep an interest in one another's work. Accordingly, their friendship has been written about extensively, most recently in *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider*, the catalogue of an exhibition held late last year at New York City's Jewish Museum that included *Impression III (Concert)* and other works by Kandinsky, most of Schoenberg's own surviving paintings, and a small selection of paintings by such other *Blue Rider* participants as Alexei von Jawlensky, August Macke, and Franz Marc.[1]

It is, however, hard to say to what extent the two men may have influenced one another. Schoenberg was at all times self-willed, and it seems probable that Kandinsky's admiration merely reinforced his already well-formed conviction that he was a great composer, destined to change the course of Western music. In any case, Schoenberg was writing atonal music well before he first saw Kandinsky's paintings in 1911. Kandinsky's style, on the other hand, was still in flux at the time of the Munich concert, and the example of Schoenberg's "emancipation of the dissonance" might have made it easier for him to complete his own self-emancipation from the pictorial restrictions of figurative art and become the first abstract painter.[2]

But was Kandinsky right to see abstraction and atonality as essentially similar phenomena? Or was he (so to speak) comparing apples and oranges? If so, he was hardly the first person to make such a mistake. Artists of all kinds—painters, choreographers, poets, novelists, even philosophers—have been inspired by music. Many, like Kandinsky, have been drawn to the radical ambiguity that is its defining characteristic. This is the quality the art historian Walter Pater had in mind when he observed in 1877 that "all art aspires to the condition of music."[3] Whether or not the statement is literally true, there can be no doubt that the work of a great many visual artists has aspired to music's unique condition.

Unfortunately, most of these artists have been led astray by their lack of specific knowledge about music. Kandinsky did know a good deal about it; but he was also an idea-besotted intellectual manqué who followed many a half-baked notion down a blind alley, most spectacularly when he embraced theosophy, a pseudo-religion popular at the turn of the 20th century whose amorphous tenets played a part in his own turn to abstraction. Just as theosophy preached the unimportance of the material world, inspiring Kandinsky to portray in his paintings an "immaterial" universe of spiritual "thought-forms," so did Schoenberg's break with tonality—a break that Schoenberg himself thought to be historically inevitable—seem to Kandinsky a necessary stage in the larger quest for a spiritual art freed from the shackles of materialism.

Both men, however, were mistaken.

AS IS clear from his correspondence with Schoenberg, Kandinsky saw tonality in music as analogous with the subject matter of representational painting. By extension, therefore, atonal music was "abstract." But *all* music, tonal and atonal alike, is abstract. It represents nothing. Even a piece of illustrative program music like Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote* can portray the visible world only by way of onomatopoeic "metaphors" so approximate that they are unintelligible without prior knowledge of what they are meant to represent. And while no one acquainted with the expressive power of music can doubt that it has meaning, the meaning of a musical composition cannot be expressed in words, only evoked by way of verbal metaphor.

Music, in short, is nonrepresentational by nature, and cannot be made otherwise. Its normal subject matter is not the pictorialization of things exterior to itself, but the passage of time. Western classical music (and all other forms of music

[1] Jewish Museum/Scala, 208 pp., $49.95. The catalogue includes essays by Esther da Costa Meyer and Fred Wasserman (the editors), Magdalena Dabrowski, Christopher Hailey, and Reinhold Heller, plus a CD containing most of the pieces by Schoenberg performed at the concert portrayed in *Impression III*, including the *Second String Quartet* and *Three Piano Pieces*.

[2] The American painter Arthur Dove actually appears to have preceded Kandinsky with a series of paintings called *Abstractions* executed between 1910 and 1911, but it was the Russian whose work captured the imagination of his contemporaries.

[3] Pater's 1888 gloss on this remark, though less well known, is more specific: "Music [is] the ideal of all art whatever, because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the subject from the expression."

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based on it) articulates time through the use of tonal harmony. Out of the inchoate welter of natural sound, musicians shape "consonances," stable harmonies that imply a state of rest, and "dissonances," unstable harmonies that imply a state of unrest. Composers arrange these harmonies in interlocking patterns of tension and release, thereby creating in their listeners a sense of directed, eventful, and dramatic movement through time. It is in this sense of movement that the meaning of Western music is to be found.

Kandinsky's abstract paintings are similarly dramatic, despite their renunciation of the conventional subject matter of figurative art, and their jarringly original use of color might well be said to resemble Schoenberg's "emancipation of the dissonance." But there is a big difference. Unlike musical compositions, Kandinsky's paintings are (to use his word) "impressions." They do not articulate passing time, but are apprehended at a glance. As a result, they require no large-scale structural logic in order to be meaningful.

And that is not the only or even the most significant difference. Much more so than music, which is immaterial in the truest sense, painting, the most material of the art forms, is part of the physical world. Whether or not a painting seeks to represent a physical object, it is *itself* a physical object. It represents itself. Thus, even abstract painting is by definition grounded in material reality, meaning that it can be understood by any viewer willing to abandon the convention that a painting must be a more or less recognizable representation of an object, known or unknown.

The violently colored, near-surrealistic paintings Kandinsky executed in the years immediately following *Impression III* (*Concert*) incorporate unspecifically "biomorphic" imagery suggestive of the physical world. By the 1920's, he had begun to construct more austere paintings out of no less recognizable geometrical forms. In both cases, he utterly renounced pictorial representation in favor of "antilogical" abstraction, convinced by his encounter with Schoenberg that his art could somehow, like music, be thereby liberated from the realm of the material. In this, luckily, he was mistaken—luckily, that is, both for him and for the richly meaningful works of art that he created.

SCHOENBERG WAS not so lucky. In undertaking to write pieces of music that drew no distinction between consonance and dissonance, Schoenberg abandoned the logic by which every classical composer before him had created a sense of temporal movement. Not surprisingly, his works grew shorter and shorter; none of the *Six Little Piano Pieces*, Op. 19 (1911), for example, lasts much longer than a minute. And Schoenberg's music also became more emotionally restricted, for the paradoxical effect of his "emancipation of the dissonance" was to create a music that seemed *entirely* dissonant, and thus could only express disordered and extreme emotional states.[4] In the witty words of Constant Lambert, a composer and critic whose Franco-Russian lightness of touch was far removed from Schoenberg's Austro-German metaphysic:

> An atonal comic opera is a chimerical thought, and though it is unlikely that either Schoenberg or Berg [Alban Berg, Schoenberg's pupil] would in any case wish to attempt such a genre, the mere fact that the task would be impossible is a proof of the narrow emotional range offered by their idiom.

In order to expand his range, Schoenberg devised the system of composition known as "serialism," in which the 12 tones of the chromatic scale are systematically arranged in "rows" that supply the musical material of a given composition. Though he used serialism as a substitute for tonality, he retained the formal structures of the 18th and 19th centuries, writing large-scale, 12-tone pieces cast in sonata-allegro and variation form. The result was a music that sounded at times oddly like Brahms—but a Brahms who had repudiated the logic of tonality, leaving behind only a shell of classicism.

What possessed a man whose sensibility was so deeply rooted in Viennese tradition to turn his back on the fundamental organizing principle of Western classical music? The answer, I believe, is to be found in Schoenberg's psyche. Though he had an ego of monstrous proportions, he must have known, consciously or not, that his musical gifts, exceptional though they were, did not include the ability to develop an original style using the language of traditional tonality. His best-known tonal piece, the string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* ("Transfigured Night"), Op. 4 (1899), is a striking but thick-textured exercise in applied Wagnerism that suffers from a near-complete lack of true melodic invention. The effect is that of a Hollywood film score, supplying throbbingly emotional background music for foreground events that never take place.[5]

By abandoning tonality, Schoenberg succeeded in finding his own voice, but at the price of his ability to write the ambitious large-scale compositions typical of the Austro-German style. This, too, he could

[4] The paradox is that in the absence of a defining tonal center, no harmony, however unstable, can strictly speaking be "dissonant." At the same time, the fact that we hear atonal music in the context of our lifelong experience of tonal music inevitably leads us to interpret such harmonies as dissonant.

[5] Revealingly, *Verklärte Nacht* reached its widest audience as the score for Antony Tudor's psychological ballet *Pillar of Fire* (1942). Though Schoenberg never scored a film, he did compose *Begleitungsmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene* (Accompaniment to a Film Scene), Op. 34 (1930), a "score" to an imaginary film, to which George Balanchine made a ballet, *Opus 34*, in 1954.

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not accept, so he invented serialism. Although this gave him the tools necessary to construct extended musical compositions, the "organization" of those compositions is factitious, an illusion supplied by the old-fashioned classical forms into which he poured his atonal music. Traditional music written in classical forms derives its meaning from the tonal ebb and flow; an atonal sonata-allegro movement, by contrast, has shape without direction—or, to put it another way, form without meaning.

Schoenberg's *String Trio*, Op. 45 (1946), the most concentrated example of his mature style, provides a perfect illustration of this problem. At the outset, its atonal harmonies and twitchy, ceaselessly changing instrumental textures create an impression of high anxiety, the same impression created by the angst-ridden miniatures of Schoenberg's middle period. But the *String Trio*, far from being a miniature, is a twenty-minute-long movement, and within a short time the listener comes to realize that the music, for all its surface allure, is not propelled by any inner logic; it is, in a word, nonsensical. Listening to the *String Trio* is like watching a long speech by a brilliantly gifted orator who is uttering gibberish: one might briefly listen with interest, even fascination, but, in time, boredom finally sets in.[6]

SCHOENBERG'S MUSIC, and the personality behind it, have always appealed to a certain kind of intellectually minded musician. Many such artists, who tend to be musicologists and fellow composers, claim to love his music, and some have even sought to convert the public at large, penning articles and books about him that resemble nothing so much as religious apologetics.[7]

Yet no amount of advocacy, however articulate or fervent, has succeeded in winning Schoenberg an audience. Though a few distinguished performers have recorded certain of his works, and even performed them in public, no well-known conductor, instrumentalist, or singer has programmed any of his atonal or serial works on anything like a regular basis. And with the partial exceptions of Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* and his *Violin Concerto*, both of which contain tonal elements, no atonal or serial compositions by any other composer have entered the standard classical repertoire. It is as if Schoenberg's "historically inevitable" music had never been written.

Kandinsky, on the other hand, is universally regarded as a major 20th-century painter—not quite popular, to be sure, but highly regarded by museum-goers and collectors—while the abstraction he pioneered was long ago accepted as part of the mainstream of modern art. Though their critical fortunes have been on the wane since the 1960's, abstract painters remain genuinely popular to this day, and their work still fetches high prices on the art market.

All this is further proof that the alleged similarity between atonality and abstraction that preoccupied Kandinsky and Schoenberg does not really exist. But the fact that they were both mistaken does not mean that such comparisons between disparate arts necessarily lack validity. Many people believe, on the basis of their own aesthetic experience, that there are significant similarities linking the various arts—indeed, that the arts may well be connected by a profound inner unity that transcends their outward differences. It is impossible to immerse oneself in the arts without coming to suspect that, in some meaningful sense, they all seek to do the same thing.

Of course, it is one thing to intuit the unity of the arts and another to prove it. To do that would require a thoroughgoing understanding of the essential natures of the various forms under discussion, one that goes deeper than the dilettantism of the enthusiast. That is the only way to avoid making Kandinsky's mistake—or Schoenberg's.

[6] The Juilliard String Quartet, assisted by the violist Walter Trampler and the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, has recorded the *String Trio* and *Verklärte Nacht* (Sony Classical MK-47690).

[7] By far the best such effort is Allen Shawn's *Arnold Schoenberg's Journey* (Harvard, 340 pp., $18.95 paper), a lucid, engaging presentation of the case. Shawn's book also contains a thoughtful discussion of Schoenberg's friendship with Kandinsky.

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Books in Review

The Measure of Greatness

Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Champion of Freedom
by Conrad Black
Public Affairs. 1,280 pp. $39.95

Reviewed by
Arthur Waldron

Reading Conrad Black's massive new biography of Roosevelt brought to mind a conversation with my father, now ninety, who came of age under FDR, admired him intensely, and during World War II worked for his administration. In the course of our discussion I ventured that I now had "more and more problems" with the career of the 32nd President. My father's surprising answer: "So do I." Thus does time gradually erode and reshape our understanding of even the greatest of our contemporaries.

Conrad Black's response would assuredly be quite different. The Canadian-born author, now Lord Black of Crossharbour and the embattled publisher of the London *Telegraph*, the *Jerusalem Post*, and other newspapers, is a tremendous Roosevelt enthusiast. As his biography makes clear, he has few if any "problems" with him.

This book is impressive both as a labor of love and as a labor of labor: in a single huge volume, it covers FDR's entire lifetime, from his birth in 1882 to his schooling at Groton and Harvard and thence into politics at every level up to the presidency, through Depression and war, all the way to the quiet end at Warm Springs, Georgia in April 1945. Black writes forcefully and at times with real eloquence, deploys a genuine gift for evocation of character and scene, and has crammed his pages with fascinating details that reflect the depth of his long immersion in the subject. Some of these details are profoundly moving. One of the most affecting, for me, captures in an image the emotional state of Eleanor Roosevelt after she learned of her husband's affair with Lucy Mercer; for decades thereafter, she would pay regular visits to St. Gaudens's haunting sculpture, *Grief*, commissioned by Henry Adams for the memorial to his wife, a suicide.

Black's greatest strength lies in his grasp of Roosevelt as a political tactician. If, for example, you want a compellingly intricate account of the deals and promises and betrayals that secured four nominations for the presidency, this is the place to turn. Unfortunately, the marvelous attention to detail in this book is sometimes purchased at the cost of overall thematic control. Thus, although the Great Depression threads its way through chapter after chapter, nowhere does Black give a focused account of how modern economists understand that watershed event, an omission that makes it almost impossible for a reader without specialized knowledge to form an opinion of how FDR handled it.

The book is divided into short, two-to-three-page treatments of discrete events and topics, strung together more or less chronologically. In one obvious sense, these manageable doses of material contribute to making the book easier

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for a reader to take in. But one finds oneself wishing for something more substantial to hold on to in making one's way through the blizzard of detail—something, that is, in addition to the force of Black's enormous admiration for his subject. Although he is capable of being highly critical—of, for example, FDR's vindictive treatment of the tycoon Moses Annenberg—by and large he seems to feel that to narrate Roosevelt's career well and fully should suffice to establish the man's greatness.

If the word means anything at all, Roosevelt was, of course, a "great" man. But just how he achieved this greatness was, at the time, a puzzle even to his closest associates—he had few, if any, intimates—and it has become an even more difficult puzzle to resolve with the passage of years and the researches of several generations of scholars. A host of perduring questions begins with the enigma of Roosevelt's inner life: his attachment to his mother, his odd marriage, his connections with other women. Then come his dealings with colleagues, captured in the image of the presidential cocktail hour, with the great man himself mixing the martinis (following, Black informs us, the old patrician recipe featuring plenty of sweet and dry vermouth) and exuding a charm so potent as to draw from his courtiers every last drop of love and devotion—only to discard them, often with the utmost callousness, when the need suited. And then there are the substantive matters: his muddled economic policies, his assault on the Supreme Court, even his decision to seek four presidential terms. And finally come the truly contentious questions about international relations: our entry into World War II, the relationship with Stalin and Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek, and Roosevelt's postwar plans, about which we can only speculate given that he did not live to see either VE or VJ day.

Any evaluation of Conrad Black's book—whose subtitle, "Champion of Freedom," is highly significant—will depend very much on what we make of his arguments on this last cluster of subjects especially. Insistently, Black defends nearly everything that occurred in foreign policy on Roosevelt's watch, from his dealings with Stalin, to the Yalta agreement governing the postwar division of Europe, to the rise of Communism in East Asia. But it is on just these issues that Roosevelt has been convincingly faulted by many students of his presidency.

CONSIDER THE cold war that commenced in 1945. This was, as Black points out, waged in Europe effectively, with scarcely an exchange of gunfire throughout its decades-long duration. Why? The answer is that peace had been carefully planned: good fences made neighbors who could coexist in relative peace. But what about Asia? There the cold war was frequently hot, and from the very beginning. The Chinese civil war was gathering steam in the mid-1940's just as Japan was being brought to its knees, and while that particular conflict entailed few American casualties, its successors in Korea, Malaysia, and Vietnam, to mention only three, took the lives of well over 100,000 Americans and Europeans.

Why this bloody contrast between the two theaters? Again the answer is planning—or rather, in the case of Asia, the absence of planning. As a result of that absence, more than a billion Asians—a far greater population than in all of Europe—have continued to this day to live under dictatorships that were installed as World War II ended. This number is arguably larger than the number of people who lived under tyranny before the war.

Could the "champion of freedom" have made a difference? The answer is yes—but only if he had possessed the ability to plan strategically for the aftermath of war. This would have required gifts far different from the sure tactical instincts that, as Black demonstrates, served him so brilliantly at home.

The defeat of an important state inevitably creates a vacuum and disorders the balance of power; how and by whom that vacuum will be filled, and how balance will be restored, are questions at least as critical as how to defeat the existing enemy. By all accounts, Roosevelt saw the postwar world as one in which order would be maintained by the same "four policemen"—the United States, Britain, the USSR, and China—that were fighting against Germany and Japan. Evidently, cooperation among those four states themselves would be ensured as much by his consummate political skill and charm as by shared interests.

Even at the time, some grasped the unrealistic nature of this vision. Washington and London disagreed between themselves over the future course of the British Empire. China was weak and disunited. The Soviet Union operated on entirely different principles from its two Western allies. Roosevelt, who might have been expected to understand all this, apparently did not. Black quotes the diplomat Charles Bohlen, for whom Roosevelt lacked "any real comprehension of the great gulf that separated a Bolshevik from a non-Bolshevik, and particularly from an American. . . . What he did not understand was that Stalin's enmity was based on profound ideological convictions."

Had Roosevelt possessed a keener sense of these realities, he would have understood that Washington's alliance with Moscow had to be strictly tactical, and that the war had to be waged in such a way as to help free regimes, and not Soviet power, fill the gap to be created by the Nazis' defeat. That, admittedly, would have been a difficult task, but the first step in undertaking it was to realize with whom one was dealing.

Black's treatment of this issue is

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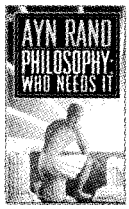

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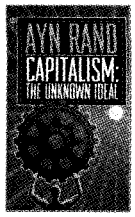

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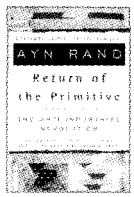

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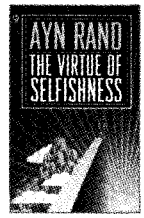

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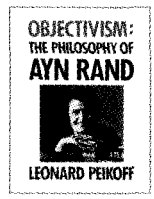

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—Harry Binswanger in *The Intellectual Activist*
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Ayn Rand's Ideas—an Introduction

By Onkar Ghate (June 2, 2003)

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of a piece with his handling of nearly every "problem" presented by his hero. Bohlen's rather devastating depiction of FDR's incomprehension of Soviet Communism he finds "surely right." But the idea that this ignorance adversely affected postwar planning he rejects out of hand. The problem, he writes, was not FDR's ignorance but "Stalin's broken promises."

True enough, Stalin broke promises—regularly. But the fact that the United States, failing to anticipate this, strove instead to draw the Soviet dictator ever more deeply both into the war and the plans for postwar peace reflects very badly on FDR's fundamental strategic judgment. The most that can be said for his "vision" is that the postwar arrangements agreed upon at Yalta, even after all the Soviet violations, did indeed bring a measure of calm to Europe—though not freedom. Alas, even this much cannot be said for Asia.

ROOSEVELT WAS at least as ignorant of Asia as of the Soviet Union. In conversation, he sometimes disparaged the fighting abilities of Asian people, and he certainly underestimated the Japanese, whom, as Black observes, he "considered an irritant . . . and a sideshow." Although Black has Roosevelt effectively pushing the Japanese to attack (as a means of getting America into the European war), that does not square with the President's decision to put his beloved fleet at Pearl Harbor, from which it could not be supported effectively in case of a real war. A more plausible interpretation is that Roosevelt and his advisers, focused as they were on Europe, did not grasp either the military capabilities or the state of mind of the Japanese. In the event, he was genuinely shocked by the attack on Pearl Harbor.

For the United States and Britain, war with Japan meant striking an alliance with China. (The USSR stayed neutral in the Pacific war until almost the end.) Nowhere than here is Roosevelt's superficiality more amply displayed—or Conrad Black's admirably resourceful ability to excuse it. Given the President's belief in China as one of the "four policemen," the best way forward would have been to attack Japan through China, with reorganized Chinese and American troops systematically advancing northward, securing airbases, and carrying out the bombing of Japan from there. Had we done that, the power vacuum in China created by Japanese defeat would have been filled, step by step, by a robust Chinese army allied with the United States.

We did not do that. Instead, we adopted the "island-hopping" strategy that eventually, after the nuclear bombings of 1945, brought about the defeat of Japan. This abruptly created an immense power vacuum, from Southeast Asia to China and Manchuria and Korea, which we and our allies were in no position to fill. Even as the Soviets entered the war, we had no agreed plans on paper of where their armies or ours would stop, or how Korea and Indochina—not to mention China itself—would be dealt with. Roosevelt spoke vaguely of "trusteeships" in some places, but never got down to detail.

The result of this uncertainty among the great powers was that their Asian clients dominated them. Whereas, in Europe, local Communists like Togliatti, Thorez, and others listened to Stalin, deferred the seizure of power they might otherwise have attempted at war's end, and died in bed without ever triumphing, Kim Il Sung and Ho Chi Minh managed to drag both the USSR and Communist China into wars they did not need while Chiang Kai-shek manipulated the Americans with impressive skill.

Following a venerable tradition tracing back to General Joseph Stilwell, and largely discredited by more recent scholarship, Black asserts that Chiang Kai-shek was hopeless as a leader and was uninterested in fighting the Japanese. He also assures us that Roosevelt understood this but, for domestic political reasons, could not do what it would have made sense for him to do: namely, link the U.S. with the Chinese Communists who were at the time widely regarded as the "real" fighters in China. (In fact, along with their leader, Mao Zedong, they spent most of the war as far away from the front as they could get, engaging in discussions of literature and art and undertaking a massive political purge.)

In short, and rather astonishingly for a man of his acuity, Black accepts the demonstrably impossible idea—the so-called "lost chance in China" thesis—that the U.S. should have backed the Communists in 1945, making allies of Mao and Zhou Enlai and thus ushering in a benign, America-leaning East Asia. As he puts it:

> Assisting the Communists in effectively ceasing to be Communists and integrating China into the world would be an exacting process. This somewhat resembled Roosevelt's intended policy to the Soviet Union. More than 25 years would have to go by before President Richard Nixon would pick up the threads of America's China policy where Roosevelt's successor would leave them.

To this, one is tempted to reply: if America could really have assisted the postwar Soviets and Chinese in "effectively ceasing to be Communists" by some ineffable Rooseveltian process of suasion, why could it not have used the same power of suasion to assist the Nazis in Germany in effectively ceasing to be Nazis, or the Japanese in ceasing to be militarists? Why go to war in the first place?

FOR ALL its genuinely illuminating moments, Conrad Black's monumental biography is repeatedly undone by its own relentless deter-

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mination to vindicate its hero as a "champion of freedom" in every possible respect and at every possible turn. Ironically, a less omniscient approach, one that did not celebrate every act of FDR's as a triumph but rather faced more forthrightly not only his humanity and his foibles but also his failures, would almost certainly have brought us closer to understanding his real but elusive greatness. For, in spite of it all, few will contest that he was indeed a great President, or that the country he led has striven devotedly to advance the cause of freedom in the world; about this, Conrad Black is assuredly right, and right again to remind us.

Sounding the Alarm

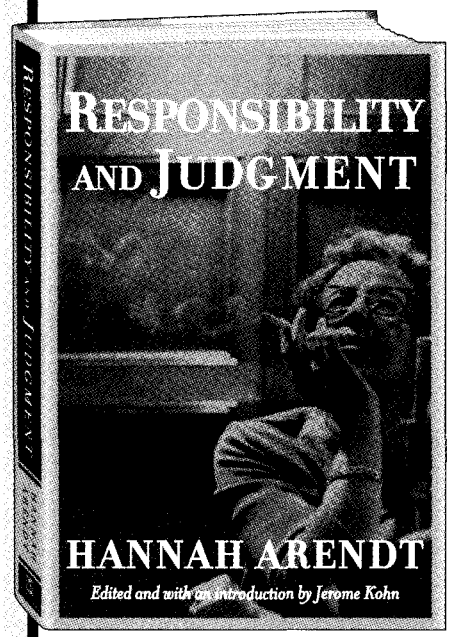
An End to Evil:
How to Win the
War on Terror
by David Frum and
Richard Perle
Random House. 284 pp. $25.95

Reviewed by
Claudia Rosett

In the war on terror, we have reached a winter of discontent. Democratic candidates tell us the center cannot hold, that we are over-extended and globally unloved, that the Bush policies have failed. We hear that Iraq was the wrong target, that Saddam Hussein may have had no weapons of mass destruction, that reconstruction is going badly. Meanwhile, North Korea and Iran are growing threats. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians remains unresolved. Osama bin Laden is still out there making audiotapes.

Claudia Rosett *contributes "The Real World," a bi-weekly column on foreign affairs, to the* Wall Street Journal's *online edition, OpinionJournal.com.*

Responsibility and Judgment — *Hannah Arendt*



"A superb introduction to her views and a chance to probe, without hearsay or slander, **one of the great thinkers of our time."**
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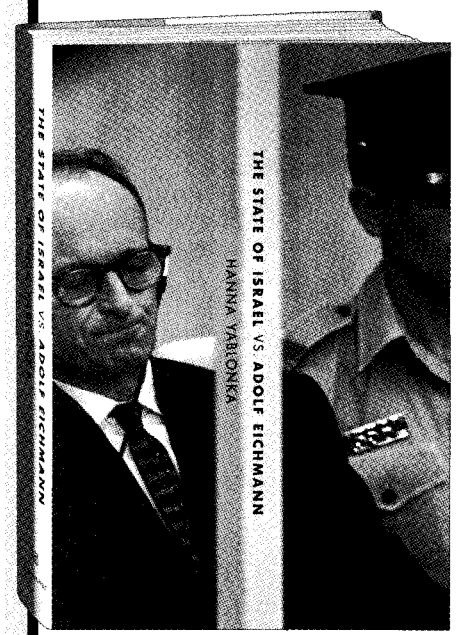

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From the Bush administration have come reports of progress, of course, but as we advance the terrain seems less certain, the strategy less clear. In a private memo, obtained by *USA Today* last fall, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted that "we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing." In his State of the Union address, the President reaffirmed his commitment to the war but listed no specific new steps, and the word is that any bold new moves are basically on hold for the rest of this election year. Our enemies suffer no such constraints. So where are we going, and what should be the plan?

Into this climate, David Frum and Richard Perle have pitched, as if from another planet, a book that in no uncertain terms spells out exactly where they think we are and what we must now do. Depending on your point of view, this could be just the kind of tonic the country needs or one of the worst developments since Frum, in an earlier incarnation as a White House speechwriter, helped to coin the phrase "axis of evil." At any rate, the book is bound to help clarify the debate.

Both Frum and Perle have been accused by Bush's critics of belonging to a shadowy neoconservative "cabal," manipulating the administration behind the scenes—though Frum left the White House two years ago and Perle, a former assistant secretary of defense under Ronald Reagan, serves these days solely in an advisory capacity as a member of the Defense Policy Board. With *An End to Evil*, the two authors, both now affiliated with the American Enterprise Institute, step forth from whatever shadows they have been suspected of inhabiting to place their agenda front and center.

Their basic message is one of urgency. This book was written, they tell us, "at high speed through high summer," and its purpose is to warn that we have reached not a reasonable resting place in the war on terror but a "crisis point." While much has been achieved, while Bush was right to go into Iraq, and while the American people have so far passed every hurdle, "Now comes the hardest test of all." Although the war is far from won, America's political and media elites are tired, caught up in election politics, losing their nerve. And while America blinks, "Our enemies plot, our allies dither and carp, and much of our own government remains ominously unready for the fight."

Their theme throughout is that U.S. leaders and our allies remain for the most part in a state of denial not only about the extent but about the nature of the threat. ("We sometimes wonder," they crack, "how the war on terror escaped being called 'the war against you-know-who.'") For their own part, they unambiguously define the evil of our era, the evil of their title, as militant Islam. Nor is this evil any less hardy and dangerous, they suggest, than the worst threats of the last century:

> In militant Islam we face an aggressive ideology of world domination. Like Communism, this ideology perverts the language of justice and equality to justify oppression and murder. Like Nazism, it exploits the pride of once-mighty nations.

And, like both Communism and Nazism, militant Islam welcomes, when convenient, "all manner of unlikely allies." Thus does secular North Korea end up paired with the Islamic Republic of Iran on the roster of our most dangerous foes, two states linked by their nuclear programs, both presenting "intolerable threats to American security."

WHAT TO do? The authors' prescriptions are organized roughly into sections on reforms still needed on the home front, where they fear the war might yet be lost, and actions needed abroad, where they warn that, despite our victories in battle, we are losing the war of ideas. In both theaters, they write, winning will require taking risks that our old bureaucracies and habits do not favor.

At home, Frum and Perle urge a thorough revamping of assorted frontline institutions. Among other things, they recommend reconfiguring the State Department to yield a staff more prone to cooperate with a war-waging White House. They propose sprucing up what they see as a still-ossified Central Intelligence Agency, starting with the firing of its director, George Tenet, who has been in charge since 1997. ("He has failed. He should go.") And in a brief excursion through domestic economics, they argue for retaining the Bush tax cuts—the better to engender the kind of economy needed to fight this war.

Abroad, they offer not so much a blanket solution as a roster of levers and tactics for dealing with individual threats—the unifying principle being that we must, in whichever ways possible, put an end to tyranny with its "poisonous cultural effect." While noting that America does not have the resources, or possibly even the desire, to replace every last dictator with democratic rule, they emphasize that at the very least "we are not obliged to honor the pretensions of nondemocratic governments, either."

In the case of Iran, Frum and Perle believe our best bet is to aid the democratic opposition within the country, and they deplore the administration's reluctance to do so. With the Palestinians, they are less optimistic, warning that until all terrorist groups are finally gone from within the purview of the Palestinian Authority, any attempt to make common cause with moderates and set up a state is likely to drag us into a "Palestinian South Vietnam." In North Korea, they suggest the most viable and cost-effective option may be intervention by China to oust the nuclear-extortionist government of Kim Jong Il and install in Pyongyang

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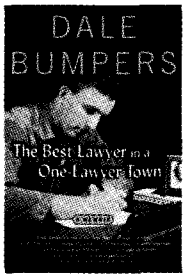

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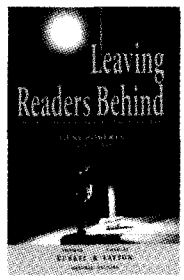

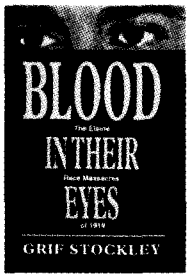

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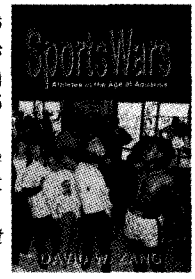

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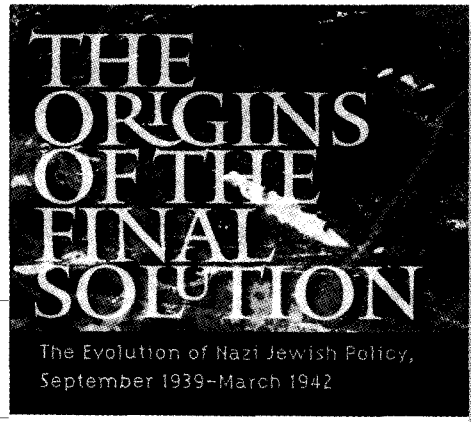

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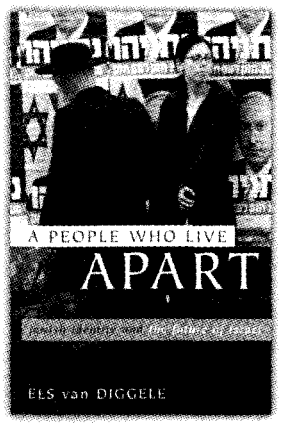
an interim, quisling regime, less immediately threatening to the U.S.

Frum and Perle also highlight the need to alter the behavior of such terrorist-sponsoring regimes as Syria and Saudi Arabia. With Syria, they suggest simply *demanding* that the government open up its authoritarian system, shut down all terrorists on its turf, and end its occupation of Lebanon, under threat that otherwise we will block the traffic in weapons from Iran and cut off the oil from Iraq. In the case of the Saudis, they tick off a long list of outrages by the royal regime against both its own people and the wider world—especially the funding of Wahhabi missionary work that spreads jihad and crowds out tolerant strains of Islam. Here, Frum and Perle urge the administration to adopt such hardball tactics as contemplating aloud the possible breakup of Saudi Arabia into the oil-rich East, home of the repressed Shiite minority, and the largely Sunni West, where the Wahhabi-sponsoring elite lives lavishly off oil sales. "Independence for the Eastern Province would obviously be a catastrophic outcome for the Saudi state," posit Frum and Perle. "But it might be a very good outcome for the United States."

THAT IS just a sampling of the ideas and proposals packed into this book, which touches on a great many more aspects of the war. Russia, for example, poses no major riddle to the authors. They observe that President Vladimir Putin has simply been selling his foreign policy, when convenient, to the highest bidder. ("Our relationship with Russia is not an alliance, not even a friendship, but rather a series of transactions.") The United Nations they assess as thoroughly outdated, "founded upon the fiction of equal competence of all the world's governments" and designed to stop blitzkriegs across borders, not today's peril of terrorist attacks perpetrated from within. They propose we either drastically reform the UN or simply discard it.

Much here may sound familiar, voiced piecemeal already in the public debate by Frum and Perle, and others. And enough ground is covered so that even those inclined in most ways to agree with the authors will likely find points of dissent. (I should note here that Frum is a former colleague on the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* and Perle serves as an adviser at two institutions with which I have part-time affiliations.) My own main disagreement is on North Korea, where I believe the risks of further trouble in Asia, including the threat to democratic Taiwan, outweigh the short-term advantages of a Chinese-

A PEOPLE WHO LIVE APART
Jewish Identity and the Future of Israel
Els van Diggele
Translated by Jeannette Ringold



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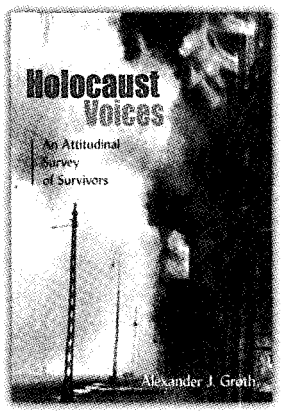

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installed regime in Pyongyang.

But the great virtue of the book is that Frum and Perle have had the courage to set down without euphemism the best global plan yet conceived for winning this war. Among those prone to demonize them before cracking the covers, this may win no converts. For the many who have, in the main, backed the Bush policies, but are now wondering where it is all going, *An End to Evil* offers a bracing contribution as well as some important bearings. Although the book badly needs an index, and the text at times has the feel of a highly readable rough draft, somewhat loosely stitched together, those are excusable faults. The authors are quite right about the urgent need, at this fractious and weary juncture, to sound the alarm.

New and Improved?

Beyond Therapy:
Biotechnology and the
Pursuit of Happiness
by the President's
Council on Bioethics

Regan. 352 pp. $14.95 (paper)

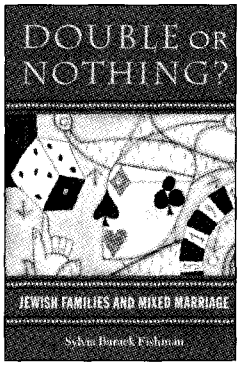
Reviewed by
Kevin Shapiro

In his recent State of the Union address, in between announcing new initiatives for abstinence-based sex education and drug-testing in schools, President Bush took a moment to inveigh against the use of steroids in professional sports. "The use of performance-enhancing drugs . . . is dangerous," he declared, "and it sends the wrong message." Most Americans would probably agree. At the same time, it seems safe to say that most Americans would not consider the spread of performance-enhancing drugs a pressing concern, which makes their inclusion in the State of the Union address somewhat incongruous.

But there may be more to the President's anodyne exhortation than meets the ear. Consider his language: he cautioned against the idea that steroids are "shortcuts to accomplishment," and that "performance is more important than character." Surely this moral injunction applies to more than just drug use by athletes. Should we not be similarly wary of other substances—say, stimulants like Ritalin, which can enhance alertness and concentration even in people already functioning within the normal range? Or mood-brightening agents like Zoloft and Paxil, which (when used by people who are not mentally ill) produce contentment and self-esteem with-

Kevin Shapiro *is a researcher in neuroscience at Harvard.*

Keeping Kosher?



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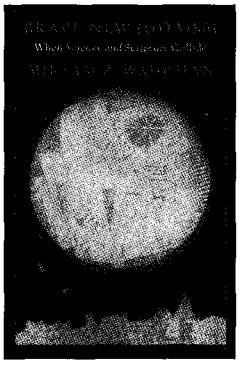

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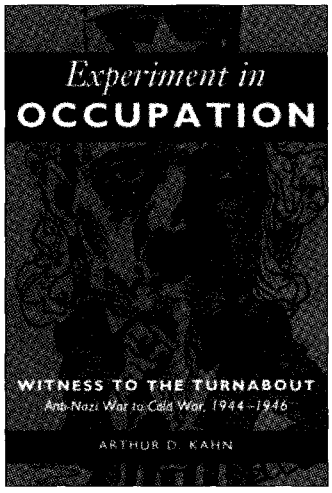

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Arthur D. Kahn

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—Carolyn Eisenberg, Hofstra University

As a participant in many of the events he writes about in *Experiment in Occupation*, Arthur Kahn offers a detailed account of the process by which the fight against Nazism came to be transformed into the Cold War. His story reveals how those in the Military Government of Germany who were dedicated to a thorough democratization of Germany were ultimately defeated in their confrontation with powerful elements in the Military Government and in Washington who were more intent upon launching a preemptive war against the Soviet Union than upon the eradication of Nazism and German militarism.

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out the hard work of self-improvement? Or the panoply of as-yet-undeveloped biotechnologies, both pharmacological and genetic, that promise to make us stronger, or smarter, or happier?

If this inference seems a stretch, it is worth noting that precisely the same comparison to steroids is made in *Beyond Therapy*, the latest report of the President's Council on Bioethics, chaired by the physician and bioethicist Leon Kass. Unlike the Council's previous report, which dealt with the topical and politically contentious issue of human cloning, *Beyond Therapy* addresses a diffuse and sometimes abstruse set of concerns: namely, the implications of using biotechnology not only to correct defects and infirmities but to alter and augment normal biological processes like muscle growth, memory, and mood. When should we embrace the powers that technology offers to us, and when should we be wary of them? What are the costs to society and to the individual? As the President intimated, such ethical challenges are certain to multiply within the next generation.

THE COUNCIL's report tackles four major topics, corresponding to our desires for (1) more perfect children; (2) excellence in athletic, artistic, or intellectual performance; (3) longevity and perpetual youth; and (4) a happy life, free of psychic pain. Each of these can be pursued by any number of biotechnological avenues, some of which are likely to prove more accessible than others.

The report points out, for example, that genetic techniques for producing children according to certain specifications—the "designer baby" scenario—are theoretically possible but would probably prove impractical. We do not know which genes are responsible for shaping desirable qualities like intelligence and creativity, and even if we did, they are likely to be too numerous and multifunctional to be manipulated easily.

On the other hand, fertilization clinics already screen embryos in vitro for various genetic diseases (as well as, in some cases, for sex). It is hardly unimaginable that they will one day screen for more benign genetic characteristics like height, obesity, or perfect pitch, allowing parents to avoid having offspring with a high potential to be short, fat, or tone-deaf. Parents also may have the option of "improving" their children pharmacologically with agents that enhance intelligence or athleticism—just as, indeed, many parents and physicians now seek to modify children's behavior with stimulants to make them more attentive and compliant.

Even these seemingly less drastic interventions pose serious ethical questions. Parents may have the right to make decisions related to their children's welfare, but do they have the right to make arbitrary "improvements" to which their children cannot consent (and might not, if they could)? Does the deliberate creation or endowment of children with certain aptitudes impose unreasonable—even tyrannical—expectations? Does the artificial enhancement of a child's abilities and performance demean the effort and integrity of achievement? Will it make the child more reliant on such assistance in the future?

Similar concerns punctuate the report's other chapters, each of which moves from the dilemmas posed by currently available biotechnologies to the more serious problems we might encounter in the years ahead. The increasing life expectancies made possible by modern medicine have already begun to have a profound impact on society, as evidenced by the rising cost of pensions and the rising incidence of Alzheimer's, various cancers, and other diseases of old age. More radical changes in the human lifespan or life cycle might have concomitantly more radical effects, ranging from reduced social mobility for the young to an increasing

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unreadiness for death among the old.

In the same vein, the current explosion in the use of drugs like antidepressants might anticipate a more far-reaching turn to managing our moods with pharmaceuticals. If that occurs, will we lose the ability to cultivate happiness based on genuine accomplishment alone? We can already boost athletic performance with steroids; potentially safer and more powerful techniques, like inducing muscle growth through gene therapy, appear to be in the offing. Do these threaten to erode the link between training and achievement, determination and performance, intention and action?

Beyond Therapy is far from the typical product of a committee operating under the auspices of the federal government. It contains no trace of jargon or bureaucratese, and is written with considerable panache, in an elevated (if sometimes overwrought) style. The report lays out its ethical analyses in a frank and forthright manner, acknowledging that thoughtful people might still not be convinced. And it avoids alarmism, repeatedly reminding readers that most biotechnologies have been and will be developed with the admirable intent of treating debilitating illness.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about *Beyond Therapy* is the systematic way in which the members of the Council sift through concerns about the uses of biotechnology, attempting to separate those that possess a larger moral dimension from those that do not. Yes, the report acknowledges, there is reason to worry about the health and safety of these new techniques; but many are likely to prove harmless, or worth the risk, and anyway, safety concerns are hardly unique to biotechnology (think of airplanes and microwaves). And, yes, though it might be unfair that some people will gain an advantage from artificial enhancements, does this represent a more profound injustice than the fact that some people are just naturally taller or smarter?

For the authors of *Beyond Therapy*, such issues are serious—and should make us think twice about embracing biotechnologies—but they do not rise to the level of essential concerns. What is essential, in the Council's view, is the possibility that biotechnological enhancement may somehow impinge in a fundamental way on human dignity. At the heart of *this* argument, in turn, is the idea that there is a sphere of activity in which human beings can genuinely flourish or attain happiness, a sphere defined by an awareness of the link between our ends and the means we use to achieve them.

We can intuit, for example, the connection between months of endurance training and the ability to run a marathon, and the connection between the successful completion of a marathon and the sense of satisfaction produced by that accomplishment. We cannot intuit, by contrast, why a drug like a serotonin reuptake inhibitor might produce a similar sense of contentment. And even if scientists understood the mechanism by which this occurs (as at present they do not), it would still unfold outside of our conscious awareness, robbing the experience of its human meaning.

The Council's approach assumes, in short, that human beings have a particular nature that is both unique and worth preserving. As it happens, many academic bioethicists and their devotees reject this point of view, insisting that there is nothing of intrinsic moral value about the human experience—as opposed to, say, the experience of a platypus or a chimpanzee. It is precisely on these grounds that the Council's chair, Leon Kass—whose imprint on *Beyond Therapy* is deep and unmistakable—has often been criticized in the past.

Fortunately, it is not just academic bioethicists who will decide how to answer the questions posed by the emerging uses of biotech-

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nology. All of us will have to consider what is at stake. As the Council points out, it is not possible for a democratic society to restrict many of the objectionable practices that go "beyond therapy." A moral consensus can emerge, however, and exert a powerful influence.

This is already the case with steroids. The abuse of such performance-enhancing drugs may be widespread, but athletes caught using them suffer disgrace, and for reasons that go far beyond concerns about dangerous side effects or unfair advantages. As President Bush rightly pointed out—echoing, perhaps, the analysis of the Council he appointed—our real concern is to preserve the meaning and integrity of human accomplishment. *Beyond Therapy* gives eloquent voice to this concern, and provides a solid foundation from which to approach the ethical and moral dimensions of our still nascent biotechnological revolution.

Abroad at Home

There Are Jews in My House
by Lara Vapnyar
Pantheon. 160 pp. $17.95

Reviewed by
Sam Munson

TWENTIETH-CENTURY Russia produced and drove out enough writers, artists, and intellectuals to staff several small American liberal-arts colleges and at least one large research university. Among writers alone, the so-called "third wave" of émigrés in the 1970's and 80's gave this country two Nobel laureates in literature, Joseph Brodsky and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (the latter having won the prize while still in the Soviet Union), as well as any number of lesser-known figures, among them Vassily Aksyonov and Edouard Limonov, author of the 1983 novel *It's Me, Eddie*.

In recent years, as Russia has become a place where writers and intellectuals are much less afraid to speak their minds, the emigration of the thinking classes has slowed somewhat. But America still exerts a pull, and if the "fourth wave" has been quieter—no Nobels so far—its members have certainly succeeded here in material terms, and *their* children, including some born in Russia, have begun to make themselves heard, forging a literary name for themselves on what is essentially still foreign soil.

For anyone interested in sampling this new development in American writing, Gary Shteyngart's 2002 novel *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* could serve as a primer. It is, appropriately enough, the story of a child of successful émigrés and of his search for a place in his adopted country. Like his creator, the protagonist, Vladimir, is Jewish, which adds a complicating factor to his search. But he is at least as much Russian as Jewish, and the novel, a rollicking picaresque, is as full of darkly absurdist shenanigans as anything in Bulgakov or Gogol.

Vladimir's mother, a high-powered banker, and his father, a wealthy but vaguely criminal doctor, have been vainly attempting for years to press-gang him into a profitable, domesticated life (when we meet him, he is serving as a lowly clerk in a resettlement agency). But when a psychotic fellow Russian enlists him in his own quest for citizenship, Vladimir, hopelessly adrift, embarks on a series of adventures that take him from New York to the imaginary city of Prava, where he leads a raucous life hawking a bogus investment scheme to a group of expatriates with literary pretensions. Along the way he encounters an amateur dominatrix, the libertine daughter of a pair of university professors, an aggressive, homosexual importer of cocaine, a group of disaffected Slavic terrorists, and various other characters living at the margins of society. At novel's end he returns to America a sadder and a wiser young man, married now and an expectant father, resigned to the uninspiring safety of the life his parents imagined for him.

SHTEYNGART'S NOVEL is on the whole impressively realized, and it justifies nearly all the praise that was heaped upon it when published. Now, astonishingly, less than two years after its appearance, another young Russian-Jewish immigrant, Lara Vapnyar, has produced a work that equals and surpasses its achievement. Her collection of stories, *There Are Jews In My House*, could not be more different from *The Russian Debutante's Handbook*. Where Shteyngart is manic and effusive, she is supremely calm and subtle. Where Shteyngart is working out his protagonist's ambivalent relation to America, Vapnyar is still preoccupied with the society she has left behind. And where Shteyngart worries about Jewishness, only two of the six stories in this somewhat misleadingly titled collection are explicitly about Jews, and they are not the best.

Of the six, "Lydia's Grove" and "Mistress" offer extended glimpses into the incomprehensible movements of the (Soviet) world of adulthood as seen through the eyes of a child. Both are accomplished and highly engrossing; but the two stories that truly stand out are "Love Lessons, Mondays, 9 AM," with which the volume ends, and "Ovrashki's Trains." The young woman in "Love Lessons," dragooned into teaching sex education at a Russian primary school, is as naive as her charges, relying for her lesson plans on the advice of a hard-bitten aunt and a clinical treatise she has managed to put her hands on. Meanwhile, she herself pines for the local

SAM MUNSON *reviewed Jhumpa Lahiri's* The Namesake *and Jonathan Lethem's* The Fortress of Solitude *in our November 2003 issue.*

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lothario and suffers the browbeatings of the school's repulsive principal. Both problems are resolved for her when Sergey at last notices her, liberating her from her erotic innocence and instilling in her an ecstatic self-confidence that simultaneously breaks the power wielded by her principal.

If "Love Lessons" is remarkable for its subtle rendering of sexual repression and awakening, "Ovrashki's Trains" is something else entirely. It recounts the summers of a very young girl from Moscow as she waits every evening at the fence of her family's country cottage, possessed by the idea that her father "will come home on one of the suburban trains." The father's repeated failure to materialize soon lends an ominous tone to her vigil, and to the reader, at least, it comes as no surprise when her uncle discloses at last that her father has been dead for the entirety of her six years on earth, her mother having lacked the heart to tell her.

The way in which Vapnyar handles the details of this revelation, seen from the viewpoint of the girl, is extraordinary:

> My father died in a little town on the Black Sea, where the sky and sea were of the same cobalt-blue color, and where the ships that came into the harbor looked startlingly white in a blinding southern sun. The coffin with my father's body traveled to Moscow on a freight train, in a dark car made of thick red boards knocked together, along with some factory equipment in plywood boxes. When the train moved, the car tilted and the boxes slid down to the side, knocking against the coffin's edge with a hollow sound muffled by the rumble of the train.

And that is that. In its serenity of tone and its cold lyricism, in the painful clarity with which the physical details of the landscape are made to speak for the inner landscape of the overcome girl, this passage re-

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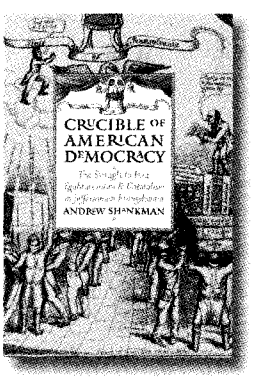

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calls the early stories of Tolstoy, like "The Wood-Felling," perhaps, or "The Raid." All six of the stories collected in this volume are polished and substantial, and some of them are psychologically brilliant, but "Ovrashki's Trains" is a singular accomplishment, a work of lasting value.

THE REMAINING two items in *There Are Jews In My House*, the title story and "A Question for Vera," are distinctly inferior. Both, as it happens, deal directly with anti-Semitism in Russia, past and present. Stories about "issues" are rarely any good—usually, the fictional elements are forced to play second fiddle to the animating idea, with a consequent loss of narrative power—and these are no exceptions. In addition, Vapnyar seems less than entirely familiar with the situations she means to evoke. But if the two do not live up to the standard of the others, that standard is, admittedly, very high.

Gary Shteyngart has been a resident of America for considerably longer than Lara Vapnyar, and his ease with his new country's cultural idiom shows to good effect in his novel. Vapnyar, by all accounts, learned English less than a decade ago, when she was in her early twenties, under the joint tutelage of television and the novels of Jane Austen. But both of these writers, in their very different ways, seem remarkably free and unencumbered. They write "purely," without any hint that they are either imitating or struggling against literary models, or groping madly, like so many of their native-born American colleagues, to say something "new."

With her surgical economy of means, Vapnyar in particular has made a compelling statement against the sterile and self-obsessed excesses of much modern American writing. All the more appropriate and satisfying, then, that this blessing, like so many others, should have come to us from the old country.

Protocols

The Return of Anti-Semitism
by Gabriel Schoenfeld
Encounter. 193 pp. $25.95

Reviewed by
Daniel Johnson

THERE ARE two divergent attitudes toward anti-Semitism today, each of them held by Jews and Gentiles alike. The groups who espouse these two views might be termed the deniers and the alarmists.

Deniers simply refuse to admit that anti-Semitism is a threat at all, and commonly accuse their alarmist counterparts of collective hysteria. Despite a global wave of attacks on Jewish targets, they either dismiss the evidence point blank (President Chirac: "There is no anti-Semitism and no anti-Semites" in France) or blame the victims (Israel in general, Ariel Sharon in particular; the "Israel lobby" in the United States; the "Holocaust industry"; Tony Blair's "Jewish cabal"). When all else fails, they seek to distance the current phenomenon from the lethal past by redefining anti-Semitism as anti-Zionism or as a subspecies of "anti-colonialism."

As for alarmists, they regard the deniers as either self-deluding fools or knaves (that is, anti-Semites manqué). Either way, the deniers are said to be betraying the Jewish people and, particularly if they are Jews themselves, the memory of the Holocaust. Whatever the subjective reasons for the denial, objectively it is held to weaken resistance to the threat. If the view should prevail that anti-Semitism is only a problem for ultra-Zionists, and not too serious a problem at that, then the

DANIEL JOHNSON *is associate editor of the (London)* Daily Telegraph. *His contributions to* COMMENTARY *include "The Catholic Crisis" (February 2003) and "What Victor Klemperer Saw" (June 2000).*

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immune system forged during the mid-20th century to extirpate older forms of anti-Semitism will fail to be mobilized to confront the new, bastardized anti-Semitism that is now emerging.

Who is right? More than a half-century after the Holocaust, has anti-Semitism returned with a vengeance? Or is it all a figment of overheated (Jewish) imaginations—an irrational fear born of collective persecution mania? In *The Return of Anti-Semitism*, Gabriel Schoenfeld has produced a masterly survey and analysis of the evidence. Schoenfeld does not pretend to be disinterested—his own family suffered at Nazi hands, and he opens this book by describing the ever more elaborate security measures that surround his local synagogue as well as the office building that houses COMMENTARY, where he works. But if he is hardly dispassionate, Schoenfeld is at pains to be objective in describing the threat posed by the new anti-Semitism. Nobody who reads this book could be left in any doubt about its gravity.

SCHOENFELD DIVIDES his overview into three parts, covering the Islamic world, Europe, and the U.S. The most lurid examples occur in the first section. Among Muslims, both indigenous and formerly European strains of the bacillus have combined to generate a virulent epidemic that is now threatening not only Israel but, through the current Islamist jihad, the West in general.

It cannot, of course, be taken for granted that the motivation of al Qaeda is specifically anti-Semitic, even though that organization has explicitly linked Jews and "Crusaders" in its pronouncements, and even though its most spectacular act of terrorism was an assault on New York, which not only has the largest Jewish population of any city in the world but is also demonized (as "Wall Street") in countless anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. But Schoenfeld leaves no room for doubt. He quotes Osama bin Laden and his chief lieutenant Ayman al-Zawahiri denouncing the "Judeo-American alliance," asserting that "America is now controlled by the Jews, completely," and blaming "Jewish-Zionist blackmail" for American support of Israel. Schoenfeld also investigates specific attacks on American soil: the murder of Rabbi Meir Kahane in 1990, the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, and September 11 itself. In each case, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories fueled the fantasies that motivated the terrorists.

The evidence amassed by Schoenfeld suggests that anti-Semitism is now ubiquitous even in Muslim countries where virtually no Jews still live (Egypt, Iran, Pakistan), or where there never were any to begin with (Malaysia). Most disturbing of all is the reappearance of discredited myths like the blood libel and the lurid accusations contained in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Even mainstream Muslim intellectual and political leaders often deny the Holocaust. Mohammed Heikal, Egypt's most respected journalist, claims that Jewish victims of the Nazis "did not exceed 300,000 or 400,000," citing such notorious western Holocaust deniers as Roger Garaudy and David Irving. Mahmoud Abbas, the "moderate pragmatist" who was briefly Palestinian prime minister, wrote a doctoral dissertation on "The Secret Relationship between Nazism and the Zionist Movement," basing his "research" largely on the work of the French Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson.

The impact of European attitudes on Islamic anti-Semitism brings Schoenfeld to compare the two varieties. He cites the eminent scholar Bernard Lewis, who argued

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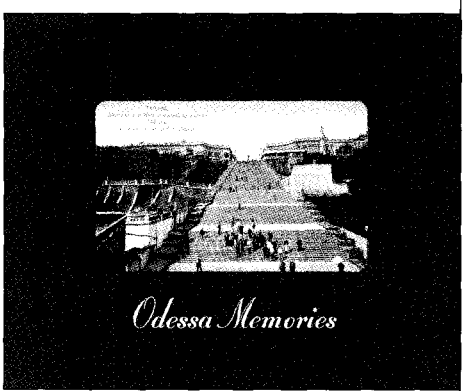

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in 1987 that, while the Arab world had indeed adopted all of the most pernicious notions of Western anti-Semitism, this had remained a "top-down" phenomenon, a preoccupation of intellectuals; the popular hatred of Jews once common in Europe was lacking in Arab society, Lewis thought. But in the years since the publication of Lewis's book on the subject, Schoenfeld believes, anti-Semitism has in fact thoroughly permeated the "Arab street." It is now as popular a cause as it ever was in pre-war Europe.

WHAT, THEN, of Europe itself, the original breeding ground? In Schoenfeld's telling, the memory of the Holocaust, far from immunizing the continent permanently against the disease, has merely forced anti-Semitism to mutate into sinister new forms.

For one thing, the identification of anti-Semitism with right-wing politics no longer holds, either in Europe or in the U.S. Indeed, the greatest threat to Jews in the West now comes from an unholy alliance of leftists and Islamists. The new anti-Semitism in the West, Schoenfeld writes, usually begins with hostility to Israel, but it does not stop there. By identifying prominent Jews as "Zionists," by casting doubt on their allegiance to their native countries, by attributing to them disproportionate power and influence, the new anti-Semitism has grown to monstrous proportions while cloaking itself in a mantle of political correctness. Actual assaults on Jews, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, the stigmatizing of visible signs like the yarmulke: all this is hushed up, glossed over, or explained away. In an incident that occurred after Schoenfeld's book went to press, the European Commission tried to suppress a report that not only confirmed a rapid rise in anti-Semitic violence across Western Europe but also frankly laid most of the blame on the continent's 20 million or more Muslim immigrants. Yet the Commission saw nothing amiss in publishing a survey claiming that Israel was seen by Europeans as the greatest threat to world peace.

Schoenfeld is at his incisive best in dissecting the betrayal of the Jews by the European and American intelligentsia. This new *trahison des clercs*—the second in a century—takes the form of depicting Zionism as a racist or imperialist creed, thus undermining the legitimacy of Israel and holding it responsible not only for Palestinian suffering but even for Islamic terrorist attacks on the West. Indeed, Israel and the American "neoconservatives"—often a euphemism for Jews—have become stand-ins and scapegoats for everything of which European *bien pensants* disapprove.

Nobody who considers the history of the last century can doubt that this intellectual offensive is cause for dismay. Anti-Semitism is notoriously an attitude of mind so insidious that it can infect even those who consider themselves vaccinated by reason of intellectual superiority. Take A.N. Wilson, a quintessential English man of letters: novelist and biographer, journalist and aesthete—a heady cocktail of high Anglicanism and ready wit. Yet Wilson uses his newspaper column to disseminate anti-Zionist propaganda, on the basis of which he then concludes, "reluctantly," that Israel has forfeited its right to exist. The salon anti-Semitism of earlier literary generations was ignored until Auschwitz; the demonization of Israel and the "Jewish lobby" now passes almost unnoticed in the same way.

BETWEEN EUROPE and the United States there is now deep antipathy on the issue of anti-Semitism, as there is on the related issue of terrorism. Many Europeans are deniers and many Americans are alarmists. Europeans deniers are convinced that the "neocons"—a/k/a the Jews—are now running Washington for the benefit of Israel, just as the Jews have supposedly always run Wall Street and Hollywood. American alarmists are convinced that Europeans are anti-Semitic recidivists.

The first step toward a meeting of minds on this subject would be to acknowledge that anti-Semitism exists on both sides of the Atlantic, that many neocons are not Jewish, and that U.S. foreign policy is conducted primarily to serve U.S. interests. What I like most about *The Return of Anti-Semitism* is that, while it does not indulge in crude Europhobia, and indeed does not spare America at all, it comes down firmly on the side of those who think that we have plenty to be alarmed about. Schoenfeld's book should be required reading not only in the White House, where it probably will be read, but in the chancelleries of Europe, where—alas—it probably will not be. Nobody who looks into this book will remain in any doubt that anti-Semitism has increased, is increasing, and must be diminished.

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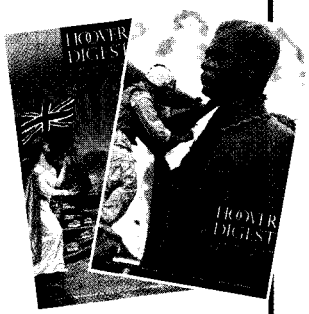

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Those who have consistently supported Israel, but not "Greater Israel," could be excused for experiencing a sense of vindication as one right-of-center Israeli leader after another has urged unilateral Israeli withdrawals from the West Bank or Gaza Strip, at least from those settlements that are most difficult to justify or defend. The Likud's Yuval Steinitz, head of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, has called for a pullback from the Gaza Strip, leaving the Palestinians to form their state there. Ehud Olmert, mayor of Jerusalem and a likely future candidate for prime minister, wants to abandon both Gaza and the more remote West Bank settlements. Others urge partial withdrawal as long as Israel annexes the remaining land—a formula that reportedly carries the blessing of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Why the change in thinking among Israeli hard-liners? Surely one reason is the cost of the eroding but still troublesome Intifada. Another is the demographic threat of a Palestinian population that may one day reject a two-state solution and urge instead majority rule in a single political entity. Finally, the Israelis don't trust Palestinian negotiators. With or without Arafat, they want no Oslo redux. Defensible borders, they say, are more important than negotiated borders; and, particularly with the erasure of the Iraqi threat from the east, Israel's borders have never been more defensible.

But a closer analysis suggests that the advantages of a partial withdrawal are modest and the downsides, great. A pullback would be treated by Palestinian extremists as a great victory—a vindication for their strategy of terror. They would seize the abandoned land and continue their jihad against the Jewish state. And their effort would be reinforced because no one, not even the United States, would recognize new, unilaterally declared borders. World opinion would hold the action illegal and provocative. And this time world opinion would be right.

Moreover, the terms Israel could achieve at the negotiating table are nothing to sneer at. From Camp David through Taba to Geneva, every serious plan has contained provisions establishing an international peacekeeping force. Every one has provided for a demilitarized Palestinian state. Every one has forbidden the Palestinians to enter alliances hostile to Israel. Every one has allowed a continuing Israeli security presence on Palestinian soil and the right of Israeli military planes to conduct exercises in Palestinian air space. And every one has demanded the renunciation of all claims not part of the negotiated deal—by far the best way to extinguish the Palestinian "right of return" to villages inside Israeli territory.

In diplomacy as in war, timing is everything. **The moment is approaching when negotiations with the Palestinians will be less a reward for terrorism than a way for Israel to consolidate political gains.** Outside the Jerusalem suburbs, which Israel would annex, the settlements are monuments to the fanaticism of the few compounded by the political cowardice of the many. They should revert to the Palestinians as part of a negotiated peace. But withdrawing from them unilaterally makes no more sense than building them in the first place.

—Robert Zelnick

Robert Zelnick is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and chairman of the Department of Journalism at Boston University.

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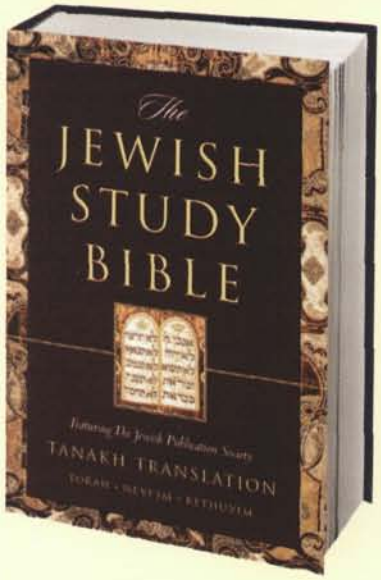

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